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BELOEIL, JUNE 29, 1864. 135TH ANNIVERSARY

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*FRONT COVER: A photo taken on June 29 1864, a few hours after the Beloeil Bridge Disaster. This view is taken looking south (i.e. upstream, towards Lake Champlain). The work of removing the debris has not yet begun, although the drawbridge span is closed and a freight train is passing. The lettering "G.T.R. No.7" is plainly visible on the side of the brake van which appears to be little damaged. Some of the passenger cars fell towards the south and are visible in the engraving on page 103. Looking at this photo it is hard to imagine that 362 people emerged alive from this wreckage.
National Archives of Canada, photo C-3286.*

*BELOW: An engraving showing the harbour of Quebec in 1859, with lots of shipping visible. The scene must have looked much the same five years later when the "Neckar" docked with its load of immigrants.
The British-American Guide Book, 1859.*

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Canadian Rail is continually in need of news, stories, historical data, photos, maps and other material. Please send all contributions to the editor: Fred F. Angus, 3021 Trafalgar Ave. Montreal, P.Q. H3Y 1H3. No payment can be made for contributions, but the contributor will be given credit for material submitted. Material will be returned to the contributor if requested. Remember "Knowledge is of little value unless it is shared with others".

EDITOR: Fred F. Angus

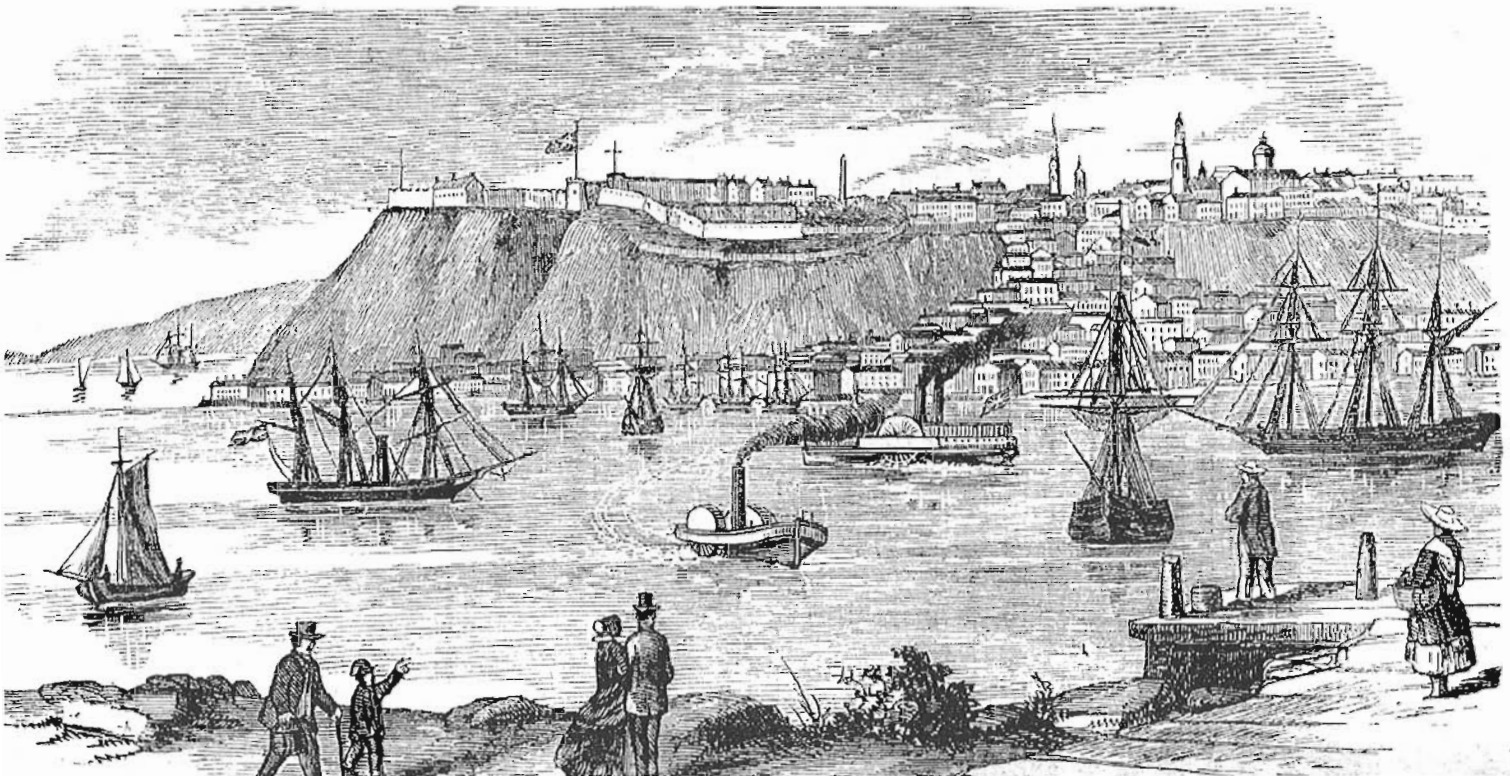
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The Immigrant Special, June 29, 1864

by John Thompson

One hundred and thirty-five years ago this June occurred the worst train wreck in Canadian history when ninety-nine people, chiefly German immigrants, died in the Beloeil Bridge Disaster of June 29, 1864. In terms of number of fatalities, it was worse than any other train wreck, in either Canada or the United States, in the 19th century, more even than the worst U.S. train disaster of the 1800s, the death of 89 people in the wreck of the *Pacific Express* at Ashtabula, Ohio on December 29, 1876. The Beloeil story has often been told, but this account by the late John Thompson, completed after his death by your editor, adds much more information.

Some disasters, like the sinking of the *Titanic* or the Halifax Explosion, never lose their interest, for there are so many "what ifs" that could perhaps have prevented the disaster altogether. That such is the case with the Beloeil Bridge Disaster becomes readily apparent as we read Mr. Thompson's story. We all know what the outcome will be, but we are drawn along, figuratively speaking, with the doomed train as we get to know some of the passengers and vicariously share their experiences. We keep thinking "if only" this or that had happened. What if the circus had not played Richmond that night? What if the crew had delayed a few more minutes at St. Hilaire to give water to the passengers? What if Burnie had driven the engine of the earlier immigrant special? What if William Haggart or Martin Wakefield had been available at Richmond that night? What if all the rules in the book had been followed? The list goes on and on. Finally we are thankful that so many passengers survived what could so easily have been a much worse tragedy, and that this, and other, disasters speeded up the adoption of safety devices, like air brakes, that have prevented many similar occurrences.

Strangely, there is some doubt as to whether the engineer of the wrecked train spelled his name "Burnie" or "Burney". To avoid confusion we will spell the name "Burnie". The name "Point Levi" also has more than one spelling, but we have standardized that too. Also, an immigrant is one who is arriving, while an emigrant is one who is leaving. Since these passengers had just arrived, they were immigrants to Canada, but from the point of view of Germany they were emigrants, hence the spelling on the stone.

In Montreal's Mount Royal cemetery, in the shade of a small group of white birch trees, stands a large granite monument. On that monument, in 15 lines, is carved the following inscription: "TO THE MEMORY OF FIFTY-TWO GERMAN EMIGRANTS BURIED HERE. AND ALSO OF FORTY-FIVE MORE WHO ARE INTERRED IN THE CATHOLIC CEMETERY HAVING LOST THEIR LIVES ON THE 29TH OF JUNE 1864 BY THE PRECIPITATION OF A TRAIN OF 11 CARS WITH 500 GERMAN EMIGRANTS THROUGH THE OPEN DRAWBRIDGE OVER THE RICHELIEU RIVER. RUHET IM FRIEDEN DES HERRN." Few people visiting the cemetery stop to read the inscription, and fewer still know the story behind it. Yet this stone represents one of the darkest moments in Canadian railway history. Let us go back 135 years and find out about it.

On Monday, 27 June 1864 the sailing ship *Neckar*, out of Hamburg, Germany, anchored at the port of Quebec after a 41-day voyage across the Atlantic. That day 538 passengers left the ship and set foot for the first time on the soil of North America at Point Levi, across, and slightly upriver, from Quebec. Point Levi was about three quarters of a mile west of the Levis station of more recent times. Most of the passengers intended to join relatives in the western United States, but they would travel by rail through the Canadas to get there.

Like shoemaker Wilhelm Kehler from Schwerin in the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg, and bachelor schoolmaster Wilhelm Cordes from Holstein, most of the people were German-speaking. They came from Bohemia, Saxony and the towns of north Germany. There were also Polish families like the Klockotsnicks, Swedes like Johanna Larsen - "a good looking young Swedish girl who had come out alone"¹ - and 16 Norwegians among the arrivals.

For some it had been a sad voyage; seven children had died on the way over and had been buried at sea. Johann

Prewina and his wife had lost a child. So had Franz Kouchal and his wife.

Theodore Hermann Goring, 6 years old, helped his father and mother haul the trunks into the wooden building on the waterfront beside the railway tracks. The family staked out a bit of floor and waited in the chaos of the disembarkation until they were told what next to do. The next step was explained to them by an official who spoke German. They must buy their tickets for the train that would take them west, from the ticket agent behind the wicket. The official would help translate. All the rest of the day the people waited patiently in the long line-up. One by one they reached the wicket and explained where they wanted to go. Wilhelm Noester and his family wished to go to Hastings, Wisconsin; he paid a fare of \$110.² By supper time there were still many without tickets. There would be no train that day.

The passengers from the *Neckar* spent an uncomfortable night in the shed. When morning came and the wicket opened, the line formed once again.

On that Tuesday morning, Charles John Brydges [rather aptly named in view of what was about to happen], 37 years old, Managing Director of the Grand Trunk Railway, was in his office at Point St. Charles, Montreal, working on a plan to gain control of a rival line.

Brydges was also an immigrant to Canada but had never spent a night in the Immigration Sheds. A Londoner, he had begun his apprenticeship in railway management at the age of 15 in 1842 when he got his first job working for the South Western Railway of England. He rose to the position of Assistant Secretary with the company when he was offered the chance to become Managing Director of the Great Western Railway of Canada, a projected line running between Niagara and Windsor. He arrived in Hamilton, Canada West in 1852, travelling first-class, and during the next 10 years he managed

to make the Great Western a profitable company. In 1862 he was offered, and accepted, the position of Managing Director of the rival Grand Trunk Railway, British North America's longest railway and largest company. The railway he was now working to gain control of was the Great Western. (He would fail in his attempt in 1864, but in 1882, after he had left the company, the GTR would finally succeed in its takeover of the GWR.)

In the three years Brydges had been head of the Grand Trunk, immigrant traffic to the United States from Point Levi had become a source of profit for the company. Immigrants paid second class fares and most were carried to the end of the line. The Grand Trunk suffered from a shortage of second class cars but, in his first year as General Manager, Brydges had approved of a policy of substituting freight cars for passenger cars whenever the need arose. "There are movable seats provided for in box cars," he noted, "[and] when immigrants have reached their destination the movable seats are packed up in a corner of the car.³ The cars were then used to haul grain or cattle from the American midwest to ports on the Atlantic. It was convenient for the company, and Brydges had never heard any complaints from the immigrants.

Brydges is responsible for his employees treating certain people like cattle. Tonight he will be awakened around two in the morning with very embarrassing news of the fate of one of his trains.

That Tuesday morning at Point Levi, A.S. McBean, local Superintendent of Traffic, received an urgent message from Anthony Jorgensen, the Government Immigration Interpreter who had been assisting the passengers from the *Neckar*. He requested that a train be made up immediately to move the people out of the sheds because two steamships carrying more immigrants were due to arrive that day, and more ships were reported downriver.

McBean had a problem; three days earlier, the last of the second class cars at Point Levi had been sent west on another train carrying immigrants. There was, however, no need to telegraph Headquarters about the matter. He ordered the carpenters to begin installing "movable seats" in five box cars from the yard and assigned four more freight cars to carry the trunks, bags and belongings of the immigrants.

McBean then had to alert Henry Bailey, Superintendent of Traffic for the Eastern District at Headquarters in Point St. Charles, about this "special" so Bailey could make arrangements to relieve the Point Levi crew when they arrived with the train

IMPORTANT TO EMIGRANTS

GOING TO
THE CANADAS AND THE WESTERN STATES.

Land Agency and Registry Offices for the sale of Canada Lands, particulars of which, as well as reliable information, can now be obtained at Brooks & Bell, 209 Piccadilly, London, England, which House is in connection with the well-known Land Agency and Agricultural Establishment of Geo. Fuller & Co., Hamilton and Toronto, Canada West.

The English Registry for Properties in Canada can now be inspected at 209 Piccadilly, London, England, free of expense, which contains the particulars of various farms for sale in Upper and Lower Canada, (varying from £4 to £12 and £30 sterling per acre). Breweries, flour and saw-mills, houses, and all descriptions of property; also 10,000 acres of land covered with capital growing oak, elm, ash, and beech timber, at from \$6 to \$20 per acre, or, in English money, from £1 4s. to £6 sterling per acre.

In the State of Illinois, the property of Martin Zimmerman, Esq., the eminent railway contractor, are 100,000 acres of the very best prairie lands, from £1 to £2 sterling per acre. This soil produces 40 bushels of wheat to the acre, besides Indian corn and other crops. The very best of shooting and fishing in the district.

There are also 1,350 acres of excellent land, some 400 under cultivation, 7 miles from the Cornwall station, on the Grand Trunk line; 68 miles from Montreal. This is for sale at £5 per acre, in farms of 200 acres, or in one lot at £4 per acre.

People emigrating should inspect the Register, at which place can be obtained the most useful information, as well as a letter of introduction to George Fuller & Co., the agricultural auctioneers, James street, Hamilton, and at Romain Buildings, King street, Toronto.

Persons will find it most desirable not to settle until after an interview with Mr. George Fuller, either at Toronto or Hamilton.

Moneys received from, and transmitted to, England, Ireland & Scotland.

GEO. FULLER & CO.,
Agricultural Auctioneers and Land Valuers,
HAMILTON AND TORONTO, O. W.

Who are the Importers of "TROTTER'S CATTLE FOOD," and "DOWNS' FARMER'S FRIEND," a preventative to Smut in Wheat and Wire Worm.

An 1859 advertisement in an English publication intended for would-be settlers in Canada and the United States. Similar ads appeared in German publications and were read by those who emigrated from the old country aboard the "Neckar".

The British-American Guide Book, 1859.

result."⁶ Tonight he would be in charge of the Immigrant Special.

Like McBean, Finn too had a problem. His job was now to find a crew. A regular freight train of a dozen cars required the Conductor to have two brakemen working under him. Their job was to ride atop the train and, when signalled by the engineer with two short blasts of the whistle, to apply the brakes (by turning a wheel on the roof at the end of each freight car). But that day at Richmond only one brakeman was available for duty that evening, Gédéon Giroux, from Point St. Charles. He was expecting to work on a freight train to the east. Finn found him and told him he would be working the special train instead. Giroux asked who would be working with him. When Finn said he would be working alone, Giroux objected. Get another brakeman or he would refuse to work the train. Finn told him he would ask the Company to send a brakeman from Montreal to assist him. Giroux reluctantly accepted the assignment on the special.

That afternoon, a little after one, Thomas King, Locomotive Foreman at Richmond, got a telegraph message from S.P. Dean, requesting him to have an engine ready to follow Train No. 16. King's task was to assign a crew. He too had a

that night at Richmond, Quebec, the divisional point 153 km up the line. A conductor, two brakemen, an engineer and a fireman would be required at Richmond.

"About 500 emigrants [sic] will leave here by special about 3 p.m."⁴ McBean telegraphed Bailey in Point St. Charles around one that afternoon.

Bailey first decided that the special would follow the night freight train from the east after it arrived in Richmond that evening. He asked S.P. Dean, Train Despatcher at Point St. Charles, "to arrange for this special at Richmond to follow No. 16 freight on white signal."⁵ When a locomotive change was made at Richmond, the substitute engine would carry white flags. This would indicate to railway employees that the special was running to Montreal behind the freight with no further orders required for its movement.

Dean telegraphed F. Sadlier, a conductor at Richmond, asking if he could take the train. Sadlier replied by asking if Conductor Tom Finn could go in his place. Dean telegraphed Finn and asked if he could take charge of the train that evening. "Big Tom", as Finn was known, was available. He was given the assignment. Some of his fellow conductors thought he was "not competent and ... some serious accident would some day be the



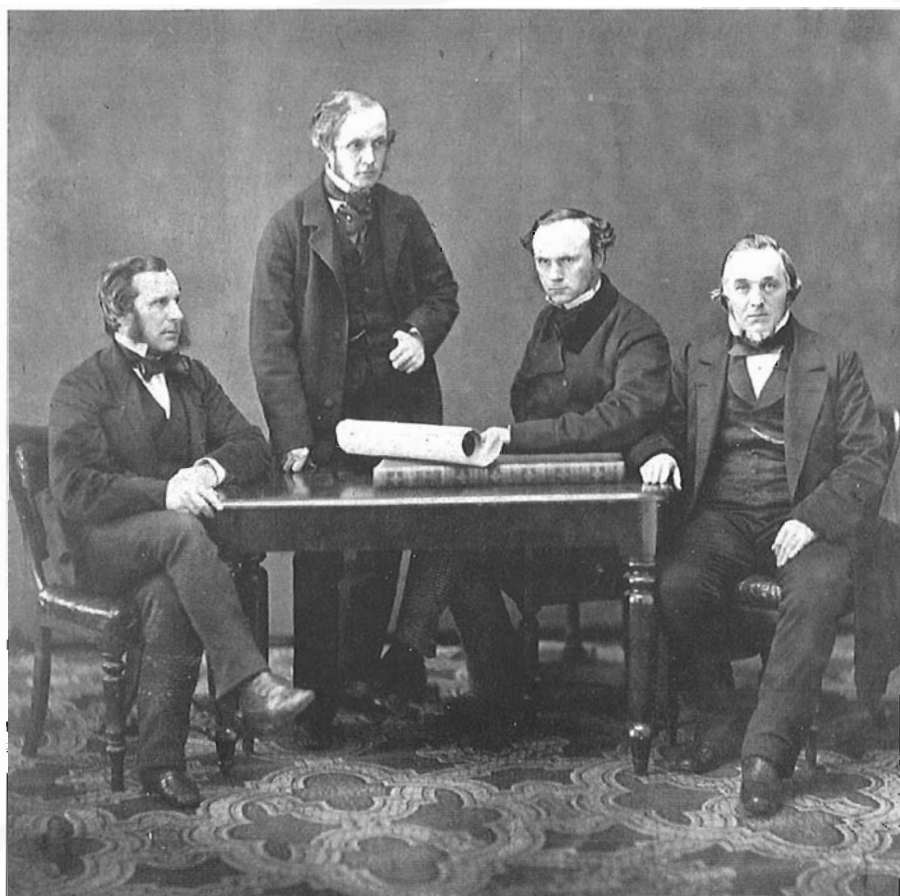
A view of the docks and terminal at Point Levi about 1864. In the background is Quebec City and the Citadel. In the left foreground is a train of the infamous immigrant cars; clearly just boxcars with windows cut in the sides. What a contrast to the regular coach, with an early clerestory roof, seen on the adjacent track. This is one of the few photos extant that show the immigrant cars. It is from a stereo view published G.R. Proctor of Salem, Massachusetts. National Archives of Canada, photo No. PA-143770.

problem. His regular engineers Martin Wakefield and William Haggert had both asked for the night off (the circus was in town). There was only one person around who could take the Special. King went out to talk to him.

William Burnie, 26, was the engineer on Engine No. 168, "the Pilot Engine"⁷ as they called the spare locomotive used to assist long trains on the grades between Richmond and Acton, 35 km away. No. 168 was named "Ham" one of a trio, "Ham", "Shem" and "Japheth" (named after the sons of Noah in the Biblical book of Genesis), built by Daniel Gunn's Hamilton Locomotive Works in April, 1857. William Burnie had only been an engineer for 10 days. Before that he had served for two years as the Fireman on the Pilot Engine and before that he had been an engine cleaner and a night watchman at the locomotive shop at Richmond.

Three days earlier Burnie had almost been assigned to the other Immigrant Special that had come through. "On or about the 25th of June last," he wrote, "I was notified by Thomas King, locomotive foreman, at Richmond, that I would be required to run a special train, loaded with immigrants, the arrival of which was immediately expected from Quebec, and that I should take charge ... at Richmond and then run it to Montreal. I thereupon protested against doing so, as I did not know the road, and was answered by King that he could not help it, as he had no other one to send. In the meantime Engine No. 145, of which W. Miller was the driver, arrived from Sherbrooke, and I was relieved from taking charge of the train in question, Miller having been substituted for me."⁸

This time there was no alternative: "On the 28th day of .. June, I was again notified by King that an Immigrant train



Henry Bailey, Superintendent of Traffic for the Eastern District, is shown standing second from the left in this photograph of Grand Trunk Railway officials. Others in the picture, from left to right, are James Haroman, Auditor, Walter Shanley, Manager, Myles Pennington, General Freight Manager. It was Bailey who made arrangements for the routing of the Immigrant Special to travel west from Point Levi on June 28, 1864.

National Archives of Canada, photo No. PA-200522.

would arrive on the evening of that day at Richmond and that I must run it from there to Montreal taking with me for this purpose the Pilot Engine. Finding that I must either go as directed or lose my situation, I did not offer any further remonstrance; but told King, upon receiving his orders, that the pistons of the Pilot Engine should be examined before leaving as they were in bad order. King told me to put the engine upon the pit and get her examined. I proceeded to the workshop at Richmond for this purpose, but found that all the hands engaged there had left, as I understood, for the purpose of seeing a circus performance which was then going on at Richmond, and in consequence, the examinations of the pistons did not take place.”⁹

That hot June afternoon word spread in the Immigrant Shed at Point Levi that everyone who had tickets should bring their goods and baggage to the end of the outside platform. Their train was backing in.

Schoolmaster William Cordes had only his clothes and his books to carry. Families like the Gorings, Prewinas and Kouchals had much more. From the platform they watched a string of freight cars roll to a stop. The first four cars were for baggage, they were told. The other five were for passengers.

It was chaos. Five cars for so many passengers? How were they all supposed to fit into so little space?

There were not enough cars for all the people, so another box car was attached. The passengers still waiting on the platform had to watch the carpenters finish installing the benches before they could get in. Shoemaker Wilhelm Kehler got aboard the last car: “A cattle car” he called it, “I saw sawdust on the bottom of the car. On the sides were benches ... through the centre was another row of benches supported by uprights.”¹⁰ Was this how they were to travel all the way to the United States?

Then another car was shunted on to the train. This one was a passenger car, with seats and windows. A crush of people tried to get aboard this car. Soon the whole car was filled and there were people standing. Better to stand in a passenger car than sit in a box car.

Finally an open-ended car, the brakesvan, [caboose] was placed at the end of the train. The car was small but had two very powerful brakes. The conductor rode in it. Today he would have company — 20 passengers crowded into it. It was against company rules, but what could Conductor Joseph White do? No one inside it spoke English or French.

Theodore Hermann Goring and his parents sat inside one of the baking freight cars through the heat of the afternoon. Finally, around three-thirty, a railway worker came and locked the door made

of iron bars spaced about 12 cm apart. He left the wooden door on the other side of the car slightly open. Then with a jolt, the train began to move on its fateful journey.

“Lot of Germans left special 3:40 pm,” A.S. McBean telegraphed to Henry Bailey that afternoon. “15 to New York via St. Lamberts, 19 to Montreal, 20 for Central district, 21 beyond Toronto, 384 beyond Sarnia.”¹¹ A total of 459 people.

For the people packed in the train it was a long, slow trip. They trundled slowly along at freight train speed, 36 kph. The people were unhappy. “They complained of being overcrowded and they had no room.”¹² said Wilhelm Kehler.

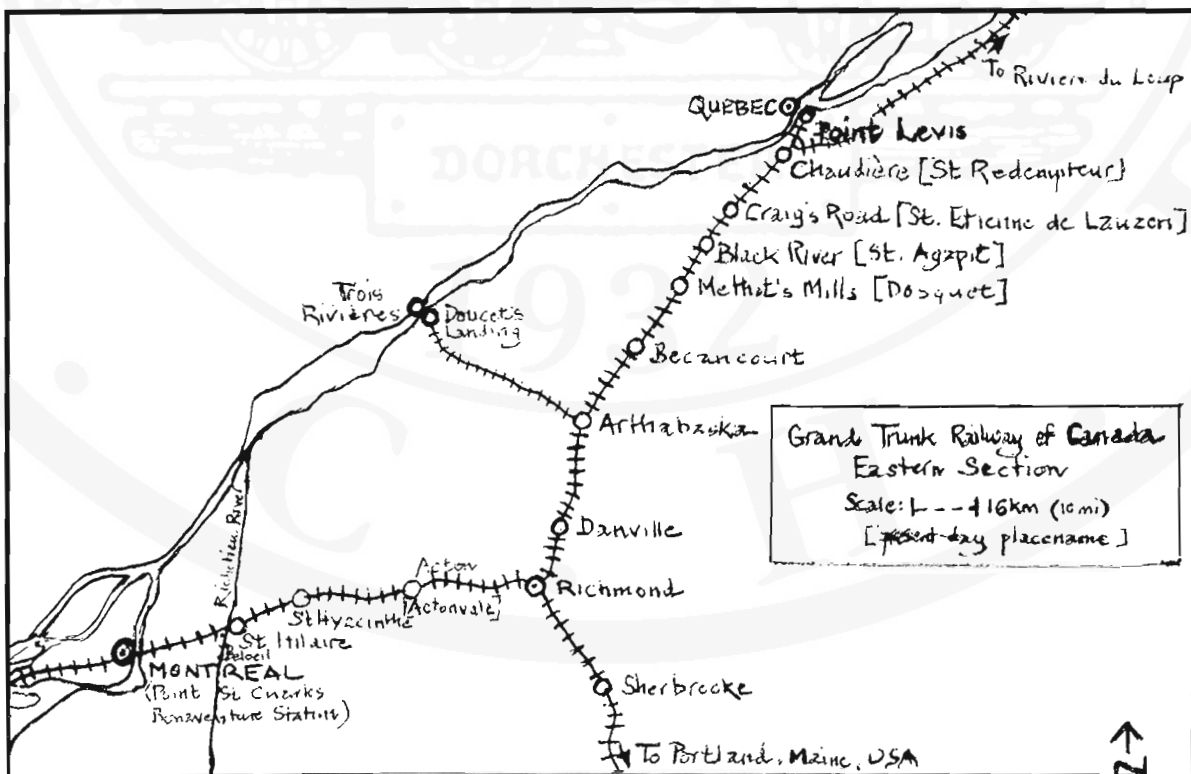
Every hour or so the locomotive stopped at stations for fuel and water and from time to time pulled on to a siding to wait for other trains to go by. At these stops, Conductor White unlocked the doors of the freight cars and his brakemen handed several buckets of water up into each car.

The minute the doors were opened, many of the men inside forced their way out of the cars and took advantage of the opportunity to relieve themselves beside the tracks. The women and children were not so fortunate. The drop from the floor of the cars to the ground was too high for them to manage;



ABOVE: The station, which also served as the immigrant shed, at Point Lévis about 1860. This is where the passengers from the "Neckar" spent the night, and part of the next day, awaiting the train to take them west. The cars on the extreme left are very early GTR coaches, but offering far better accommodation than the immigrant cars. The coach added to the train was likely of this type. National Archives of Canada, photo No. PA-165571.

BELOW: A drawing of the Eastern Section of the GTR showing the route of the Immigrant Special. John Thompson.





ABOVE: Richmond station, Canada East, where the Immigrant Special arrived at 9:02 in the evening of June 28, 1864. National Archives of Canada, photo No. PA-200514.



The interior of a crowded coach during an overnight trip in the 1860s. This was elegant compared to the Immigrant Special. The coach in the illustration has an early clerestory roof for light and ventilation, and some of the passengers are occupying a double seat. No such luxury was available on the train in our story; there everyone was crowded into far more spartan space.

“they were compelled to procure relief as best they might in the sitting or standing positions which they occupied in these over-filled cars, to the setting aside of common decency and to the disgust of themselves and their fellow passengers.”¹³

Meanwhile, up the line at Richmond, Engineer William Burnie went to the engine house after supper. White flags were on the front of the 168. His fireman, Nicholas Flynn, was firing up the boiler, getting up steam for the night's run. Until 10 days ago, Flynn had been the boy who cleaned the locomotives in the shop. He had been appointed fireman when Burnie became an Engineer, and he had never been over the road to Montreal in the cab of an engine.

Burnie's boss, Mr. King, was not around; he was at the circus.¹⁴ Burnie - worried that he did not know the road beyond Acton, 20 miles away - talked to William Ames, the night watchman, about his predicament. Ames loaned him a copy of the timetable so at least he would know the names of the stations along the route and the distances between them.

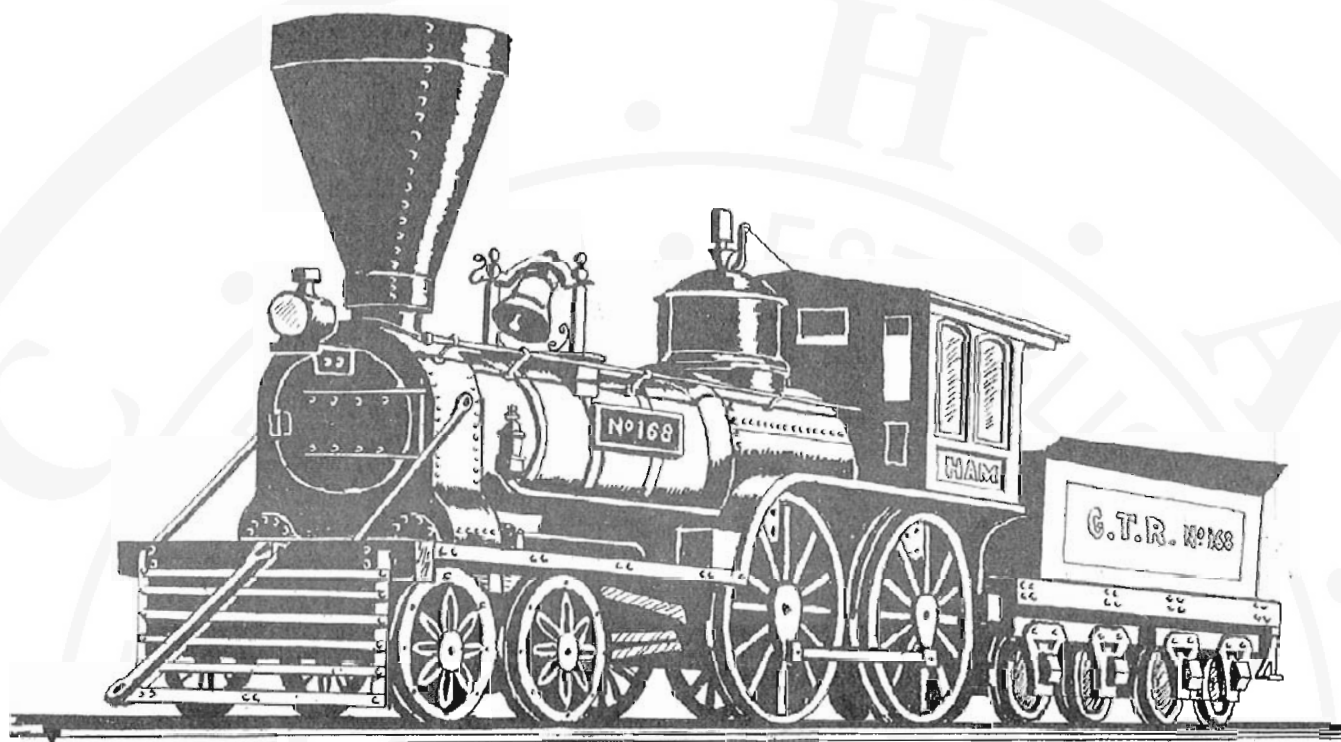
At 9:02 p.m., five and a half hours after leaving Point Levi, the Special arrived in Richmond. The Quebec brakesman uncoupled the engine and tender from the first box car and signalled for the engineer to move off to the engine house. The other brakesman began unlocking the doors of the freight cars and people began jumping out. A freight train full of people! Burnie, Flynn and brakesman Giroux, watching from the 168, had never seen this before.

Burnie backed his engine on to the Special and Giroux attached the locomotive to the train. Giroux was working under protest. He was still the only brakesman on a 12-car train that should have had two assigned. Conductor Finn had assured him that the company was sending another brakesman from Point St. Charles, but he would not join the train until they got to St. Hyacinthe.

In fact, there was no possibility of another brakesman joining them, and Conductor Tom Finn, climbing aboard the brakesvan at the end of the train, knew it. The Company could not get another man to him in time. He had to fool Giroux into working.

Finn's orders were to wait until Train Number 9, a passenger train from the east, had come through, then follow Train Number 16, a freight, also from the east, to Montreal under white signal.

Burnie sat with Fireman Flynn in the cab of his engine until the two other westbound trains had left. At 10:05 p.m. Conductor Finn gave them the signal to depart. Off into the night headed wheezy 168 and the Immigrant Special.



A drawing by Omer Lavallée, of No. 168 as she appeared at the time of the disaster.

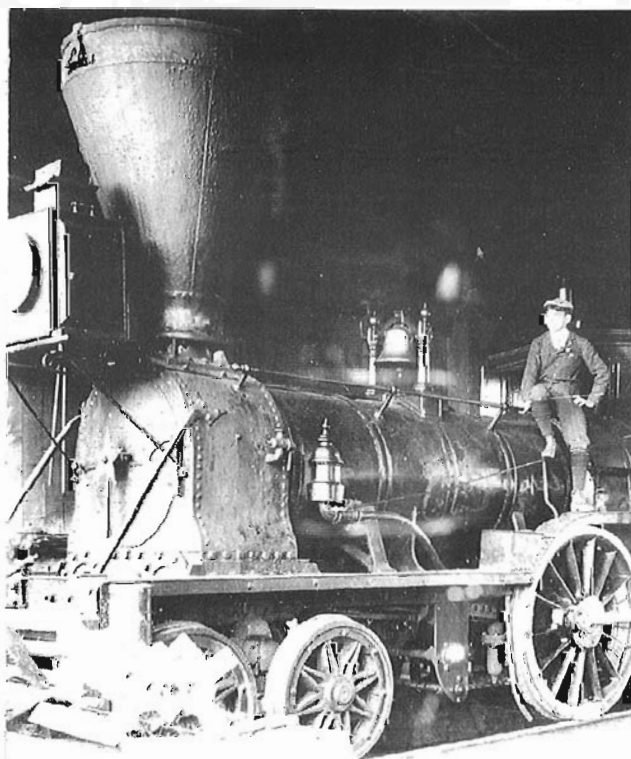
It was not pleasant in the box cars after the sunset. There were no lamps and the wind blew in through the metal bars of the door. "We complained of the heat of the day and the cold during the night."¹⁵ said shoemaker Wilhelm Kehler.

The train arrived at Acton around 11 o'clock. The 168 was losing steam, so Burnie drew up to the water tank and replenished the water supply in the tender. He then moved up to the woodpile and Brakesman Giroux and the Woodman threw firewood into the tender. After they had finished, Burnie shouted down to Giroux and asked him to climb into the cab. There he asked Giroux if he knew the road to Montreal. Giroux said he did. Burnie asked him if he would stay on the engine to show him where the up and down grades were, because he did not know the road. Giroux looked at the young fireman; did he not know the road? No, Nicholas Flynn told him over the hiss of the engine, only the way to Quebec.

It was against Company rules for a brakesman to ride on the locomotive; Gédeon Giroux had never ridden on a locomotive over the line. He looked at the two young men in front of him. Tonight he would have to.

The passengers in the cars waited for the doors to open at this stop in the darkness. They did not open. "We got no more water," said Wilhelm Kehler. With a jolt, the train set off again. There was talk of forcing the Company to provide proper cars when they reached Montreal.

Around midnight, about a mile before reaching St. Hyacinthe, Burnie was going a little too fast to be able to stop the train at the water tank, so Giroux jumped up to the top of the freight cars and put on the brakes of ten of the cars. This slowed down the train enough for Burnie to stop right at the tank. It took only a few minutes to water the engine. Burnie



The "Grenville" of the Carillon & Grenville Railway was similar to GTR 168, but slightly smaller. Also built by Dan Gunn of Hamilton in the 1850s, it was in service until 1910. Here we see it about 1900.

Argenteuil County Historical Society Museum, Carillon, Que. Collection of the author.



ABOVE: The Grand Trunk had a medal, known as the Trevithick Medal which was presented to locomotive engineers for "General Efficiency and Good Conduct during the year". In 1861 William Haggart was a recipient of that medal. He was one of two engineers who took the night runs west of Richmond, and under normal circumstances might well have driven No 168, in which case the disaster would not have happened. That fateful night, however he was off duty, at the circus.

Canadian Coin Cabinet by Joseph LeRoux, 1888.

BELOW: The actual medal awarded to William Haggart in 1861. It is of silver, 1.8 inches in diameter. On the edge is the inscription "W.S. MACKENZIE. LOCO. SUP.". Mr Haggart modified it by soldering a pin to the head side so that it could be worn with the inscription side showing. One wonders if he was wearing it on June 28, 1864.

Collection of Fred Angus.



checked the timetable Ames had given him. Only 32 miles more, perhaps two hours, and the train would be rolling over Victoria Bridge and in to Montreal.

No one told Burnie about another bridge ahead. This spanned the Richelieu river at Beloeil. It had been built in 1848 as part of the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railway which had become a component of the Grand Trunk upon its completion in 1853. The Beloeil bridge was of tubular construction, much like Victoria Bridge, except the track was on top of the tubes instead of inside them. In addition, it had a swing span at the Beloeil side of the river to allow boats to pass through on the

way to and from Lake Champlain. The Montreal *Gazette* had described it thusly in an article on December 29, 1848, reporting on the opening of the St. L & A to St. Hyacinthe:

"Here the great engineering difficulty of the route is got rid of, by a stupendous bridge, or viaduct twelve hundred feet in length, with an elevation of upwards of fifty feet from the river. The engine which had hitherto proceeded at the rate of about thirty miles an hour, somewhat slackened its speed in crossing the bridge. To those who plead guilty to nerves, the effect of this temporary suspension in mid air may be somewhat startling, but from carefully noticing the effect of the passage of the cars, we are satisfied that there does not exist the slightest deflection or vibration, and the entire structure seemed as firm as a rock. This bridge was erected at a cost of 22,000 pounds [\$88,000], and is considered to be one of the best, if not the very best, constructed bridges on this continent."

By the time Burnie checked his timetable it was past midnight and a new day had begun - June 29, 1864 - a day that was destined to be remembered with horror for many years to come.

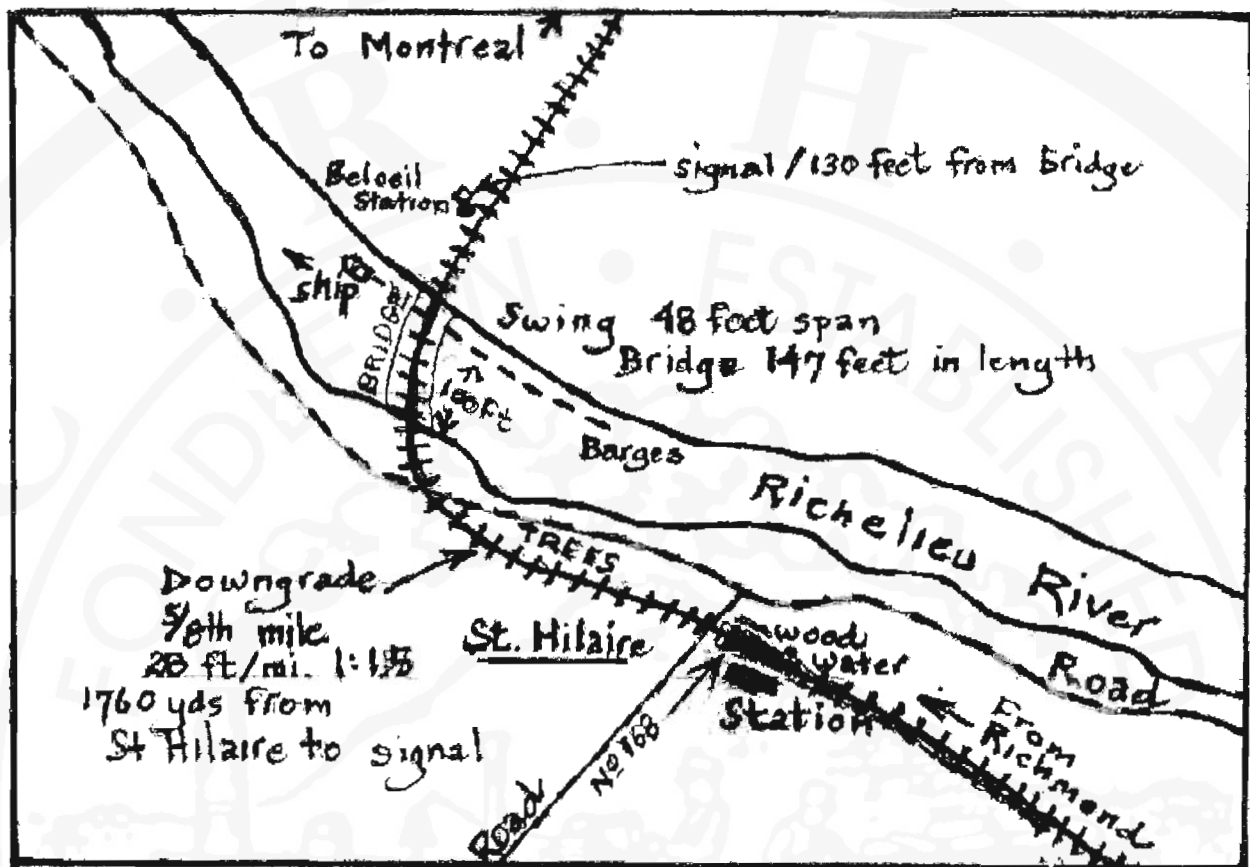
The next station was St. Hilaire, 13 miles [20 km] away, then Beloeil, a flagstop a mile after that. Giroux got back in the cab, unhappy. St. Hyacinthe was where another brakesman was supposed to join the train, the Conductor had told him. No brakesman was waiting. Burnie pulled the throttle and they were underway again.

Riding on the brakesvan at the rear of the train with two dozen immigrants sharing his space, against company rules, Conductor Finn noticed that the red signal light on the back of the van had gone out. It was also against the rules to run without the red warning light. A train following them could not see them and could crash into them should they be forced to stop along the way unexpectedly. It was the job of the brakesman to trim the lamp. When they reached the next stop, Finn would find Giroux.

At Beloeil, two stations up the track, around twelve-thirty that morning, Nicholas Griffin, Assistant Bridge tender at the swing bridge over the Richelieu River, watched Train No. 16, the last train of the night, or so he thought, roll past. Twenty five minutes later, at about five to one, he heard the whistle of the steamboat *Champlain* in the river below signalling him to open the swing bridge. The ship was towing a number of barges with high masts up the river to Lake Champlain, and the movable span had to be open for them to get past the bridge. Griffin walked with his lantern out on the bridge to the crank which operated the swing span. Two minutes of turning it swung the span around enough for the masts of the barges to pass through.

Burnie pulled up to the water tank at St. Hilaire at 1:05 a.m. Woodman Benjamin Valiquette jumped on to the tender and directed the waterspout into the hole in the tank.

Station Agent Thomas Valiquette came out of his station and walked to the locomotive. He saw the white flags on the engine and knew he had no need to give it any train orders; still, it was his duty to warn the driver that there was a train on the track 35 minutes ahead of him. Beware. Burnie acknowledged the message.



The track layout in the vicinity of the Beloeil Bridge as it was at the time of the disaster.

Drawing by John Thompson.

Valiquette did not warn Burnie about the swing bridge. There was no telegraph communication between the bridgeman and the St. Hilaire station agent. No one on the St. Hilaire side of the river knew that the bridge was open.

Walking back to his station, Valiquette heard voices and coughing inside the box cars. He realized that this was a freight train full of people.

The passengers inside the cars were thirsty, stiff, cold and exhausted. Those who were awake heard the Station Agent walk by, and then another set of steps from the rear of the train. But no one unlocked the doors to give them water and relief.

Benjamin Valiquette shut off the water, jammed the cap back on the tank, then jumped down and started throwing wood on to the pile in the tender. Just then, Conductor Finn arrived at the woodpile and gave him some help. This was the brakeman's job. Where was Giroux? When they had finished wooding up, Finn went to look for the brakeman. He found him in the cab of the locomotive.

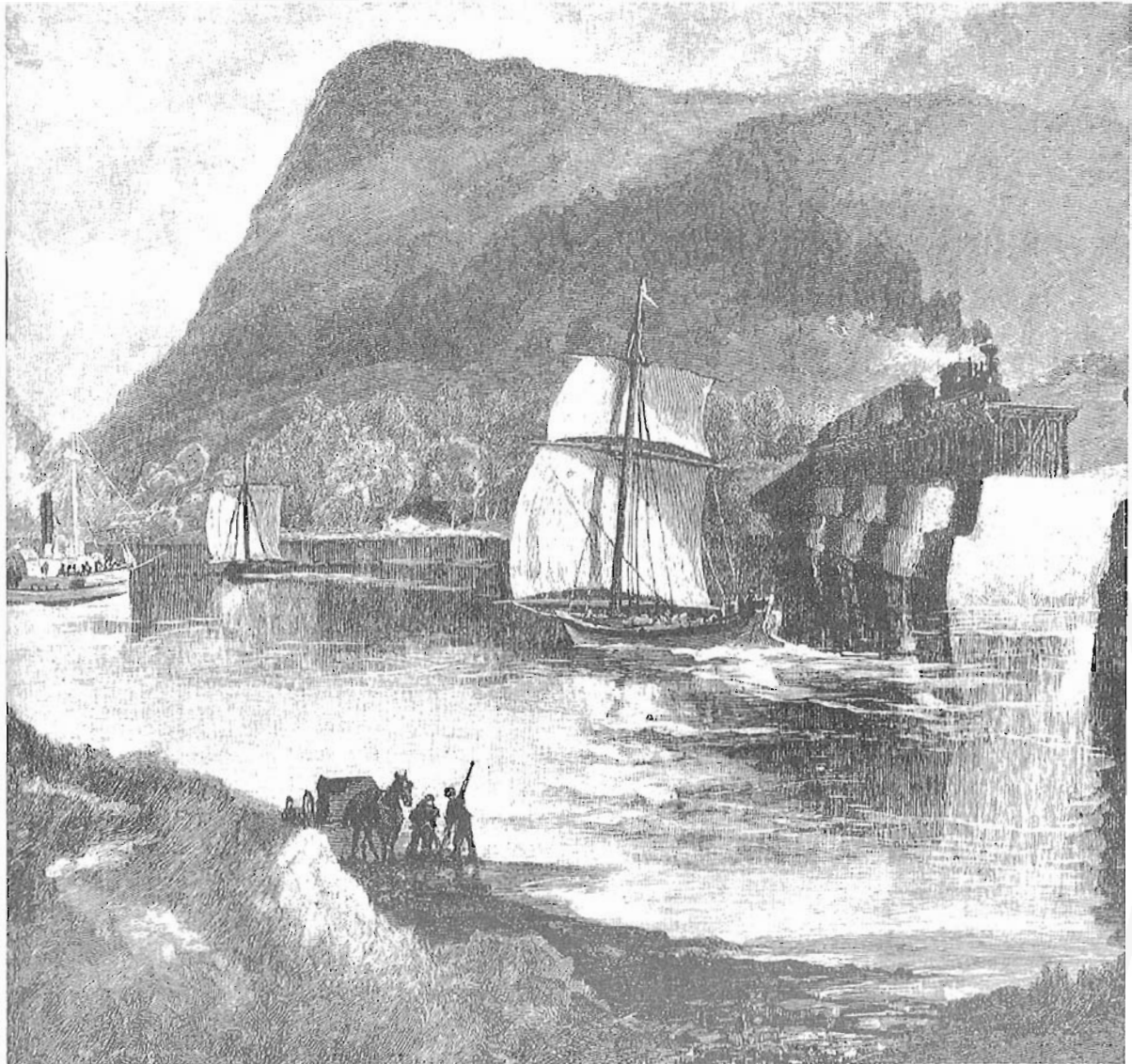
Giroux explained that the engineer did not know the road and had asked him to ride with him. Finn told Giroux the signal light on the van had gone out. He wanted him to go back and trim the wick. He would take his place on the engine.

The next stretch of track was one of the most complicated on the line and there would be nobody minding the brakes. In front of Burnie as he looked out was a crossroad. Beyond it the track sloped downward somewhat. On the right

were some trees. At the bottom of the grade there was another crossroad and a 90 degree turn. Then the swing bridge. Here Rule 24 of the Grand Trunk Railway stated that the engineer should bring his locomotive to a stop, check the signal on the Beloeil station house, down the track somewhat on the other side of the Richelieu River, and, if it is not red, to proceed across the bridge. In fact, few trains ever came to a stop any more before entering the bridge. Engineers just slowed down before heading on to the swing bridge. Finn did not even mention it to Burnie as they set off down the track.

The events that took place during the next few moments are best described in Burnie's words: "I think it was about twenty minutes past one o'clock a.m., when we left St. Hilaire and just as we were getting on to the bridge over the Richelieu River at Beloeil, I looked along the train [mistake] to see how it was coming round the curve which is met with immediately before entering the bridge. In an instant after this I saw the danger signal which appeared to me on that side of the bridge opposite me. I whistled at once, without a moment's delay for the brakes to be put on. I used every effort in my power to reverse the engine and to stop the train.... The brake on the tender was broken and entirely useless.... The moment, however, that the Conductor saw the danger signal, without saying a word, jumped from the engine to the tender and thence to the top of the first car..."¹⁶

Conductor Finn did not stop to put on the brakes, but kept on running back towards the end of the train.



An artist's conception of the last terrifying seconds as engine 168 and its train approached the open drawbridge. Behind looms Mont St. Hilaire. Canada's worst train wreck was about to happen.

Meanwhile, at the bridge, Nicholas Griffin watched as the tug and barges passed upriver. Suddenly he thought he heard a train start up at St. Hilaire. "No", he thought, "this can't be, the last train has already gone by". Very soon, however, there was no doubt; a train was coming around the curve leading to the bridge. Griffin had a moment of panic as his first thought was that the signal light had gone out. To make certain, he ran out and checked the lamp mounted on the side of the swing span. A quick glance showed that it was all right, shining its red danger signal across the open gap. By now the noise of the train had turned to a loud rumble; it was on the tubular span of the bridge, and it was not stopping. Griffin grabbed a red lantern, ran out on the track and waved it madly. "Stop, for heaven's sake. STOP!" It was no use, the train came on, and suddenly there was loud whistling for brakes. Then sparks flew from the driving wheels as the engine was reversed, in a futile attempt to stop. On came the train, until the engine reached the gap and fell in on top of a barge that was passing. Then, one by one, all the cars fell in with a deafening noise, and the real horror became

evident. This was a passenger train, and among the splintered wreckage were hundreds of people. It was a sight that Griffin would remember the rest of his life.

Inside the van, Brakesman Giroux heard the whistle just as he finished trimming the lamp. He looked up, saw that they were already on the bridge and were going too fast to stop, even if he could reach the brakes through the crowd of people in the car. He knew who was on the engine. He ran out the door, heard the crashing of the train falling, and had only time to jump.

Burnie: "No brakes were applied as they should have been, I however, stuck with my engine and went down with her when she fell from the bridge into the Richelieu River owing to the Swing bridge being open."¹⁷

Although Burnie had reversed the engine, it was too late. The train was not going very fast, but the sheer momentum of all the cars pushed the engine over the edge. Then the cars tumbled in until the entire train was in the river.

Little Theodore Hermann Goring died. So did his mother, Magdalena.

Johann Prewina's wife was killed.

Anna Klockotsnich lost her husband and her little daughter.

The Frohleck's baby was crushed to death.

Franz Kuchal and his wife lost their year-old child.

Hermann Ludgewig's wife and child both died.

Fireman Nicholas Flynn went down with the engine and was killed.

Conductor Tom Finn's body was the last to be found. An extra large coffin had to be ordered for him.

Ninety-nine people died. It is still [1999] the worst railway accident in Canadian history. It is a record which we all sincerely hope will never be broken.

But hundreds lived. They plunged off a swing bridge in the middle of the night, aboard crowded and locked freight cars, and survived.

Shoemaker Kehler lived. His wife broke her wrist.

Wilhelm Guttner and Johanna Larsen had broken arms.

Schoolmaster William Cordes lost his clothes and his books but escaped unhurt. Later that summer, in Montreal, he and Johanna Larsen were engaged to be married.

Wilhelm Noester and his family spent some time in the Montreal General Hospital. After their release in August, they decided to settle in the German settlement in the Ottawa Valley, instead of moving to Wisconsin as they had planned.

Brakesman Giroux also lived. He caught hold of a chain on the bridge as the van tipped over the edge, swung for minutes over the river below, then managed to scramble back on to the top of the bridge.

William Burnie was in the engine when it went down. It hit the third barge in the river below, filled with oats, which cushioned the plunge. The locomotive plowed into the sand of the riverbed and Burnie somehow managed to come up from the bottom of the river. Louis L'Adventure, Captain of the barge St. Louis, pulled him, struggling, from the water.

362 people survived. It is as big a miracle as it is a disaster. The crews of the barges are the heroes here. They saved many from drowning and, with their axes, broke open the wooden freight cars and saved many more from suffocating. Help was on the spot.

Help was also on the way from other sources. First to learn of the accident were the local residents of Beloeil, many of whom had been awakened from deep sleep by the thunderous sound of the crash. In a very short time they made their homes available for the care of the rescued passengers. Very quickly the news was telegraphed to Montreal, and emergency plans were made. The Grand Trunk made immediate arrangements to dispatch a special train with emergency supplies and a medical team headed by doctors Scott, Howard and Hingston. One Montreal doctor recalled years later that he was awakened, very early in the morning, by a loud knocking on his door. Answering, he was told "There's been a terrible train wreck, can you come?". In minutes, he and others were ready and before daylight were on the way to Beloeil.



William Burnie grabs the lever with both hands while Nicholas Flynn pulls on the whistle cord, and the communication bell cord (which did not actually exist) in this somewhat fanciful engraving of the scene in the cab of No. 168 at the moment it plunged off the bridge.

In this era before the days of radio, television or telephone, it is remarkable how quickly the news spread through Montreal. Telegraph messages soon reached the city and, despite the early hour, word spread, largely by word of mouth. The morning newspapers got out extras, and the evening papers had lengthy accounts, some written by their reporters on the spot.

Montrealers, in that year of 1864, were used to hearing news of horrors. Only a few hundred miles away a terrible bitter war was being fought between the North and South in the United States, and casualties were very heavy. Names like The Wilderness and Spotsylvania were current news, as the papers were full of the campaigns of generals Grant, Lee and Sherman. During the previous two decades there had been several steamboat wrecks on the St. Lawrence which had claimed more lives than the Beloeil disaster. But the news from Beloeil was different. This was not news from a distant battlefield, or of a shipwreck far down the river. This was something almost on the doorstep of Montreal, and the response was immediate. More help was needed fast and more help was coming.



This photo of the wreckage is one of three taken soon after the accident, probably on June 29. It differs from the photo on the cover in that it is in horizontal format and there is no train crossing the bridge. The brake van, the last to fall, is scarcely damaged at all. National Archives of Canada, photo No. C-3285.

Close on the heels of the Grand Trunk relief train, others were soon on the way. Among the passengers were Montreal Mayor Beaudry, Judge Coursol and officers of the German Society. As quick as possible, survivors were brought to Montreal and, if injured, were taken to the Montreal General Hospital or the Hotel Dieu. By 4:00 P.M., only fifteen hours after the wreck, all the survivors had arrived in Montreal.

Work continued for days removing wreckage and recovering the bodies of the victims. The later were laid out in a shed for identification. The final death toll is still in doubt, as different accounts vary. One contemporary account says that there were 89 victims, but it is now believed that 97 passengers died, plus conductor Finn and fireman Flynn, a total of 99.

Of course, as is always the case at such times, the disaster attracted curiosity seekers who came, not to help in the rescue efforts, but to see the spectacle. Five weeks later, on August 3, a spectator became the "100th victim" when he leaned from a passing train and "struck against upright bar of bridge".

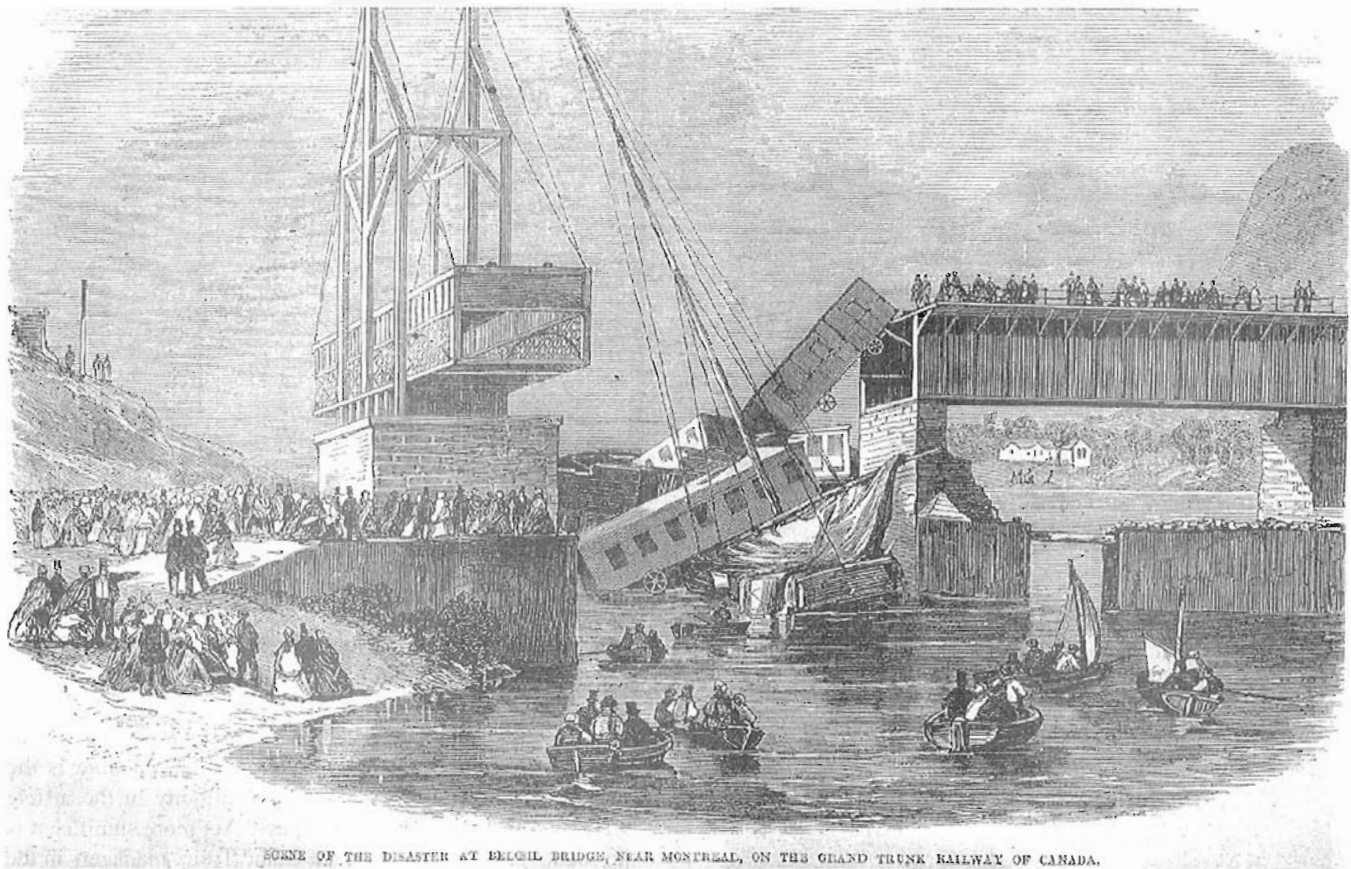
By August, however, the wreckage had been removed and repairs made. The physical remains of the wreck were gone, and now the proceedings moved into the corporate offices and the courtrooms. The newspapers, of course, avidly followed the story which was extensively reported.

William Burnie was made a scapegoat for what was, in effect, the fault of the whole system. Because he was wearing dry clothes when first seen by manager Brydges, he was accused of jumping off the engine before it even reached the bridge. This was soon proved to be false (he had changed clothes after the wreck), but the GTR still blamed him for the disaster. Arrested, and found guilty of "gross carelessness" by a coroner's jury, Burnie was charged with manslaughter. He was in jail until October when cooler heads prevailed and he was released. Thirty years later he was still pointed out as "the engineer of the Beloeil Bridge Disaster". Perhaps he too should be considered as a victim, for his life was ruined.

Verbatim accounts of the testimony heard by the Coroner's Jury investigating the accident between 30 June and 13 July 1864 were published in *The Gazette* and the *Montreal Witness* during this period. These form the basis of this narrative.

The *Witness* published reports of sessions of the Committee for Adjudicating the Claims of German Immigrants at the Montreal General Hospital, 20 - 28 July 1864. These contain much useful information about the passengers.

In an article "The Burnie Habeas Corpus," (*Witness* 27 July 1864, see appendix), William Burnie's sworn account of his role in the accident was published in full.



SOME OF THE DISASTER AT BLOEIL BRIDGE, NEAR MONTREAL, ON THE GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY OF CANADA.

This detailed woodcut was published in the Illustrated London News in England during the summer of 1864. It is taken from the upstream (south) side, and shows some of the other cars, as well as the swing bridge. However there is some artistic licence.

Finally, on 8 October 1864 the Witness carried a story entitled "Presentment of the Grand Jury" (also reproduced as an appendix). No bill of indictment was found against William Burnie, accused of manslaughter and he was freed from prison where he had been held since 29 June. "The Grand Trunk Company of Canada," the Grand Jury concluded, "are mainly responsible and to blame for this melancholy catastrophe."

News of this disaster spread far and wide. One person who read it was George Westinghouse, who was, even then, thinking about stopping trains more quickly than the inefficient method of "decorating" the tops of the cars. Five years later (1869), he patented the first air brake which has saved countless lives, and would likely have prevented the 1864 disaster if it had been in existence and in use on the Immigrant Special.

C.J. Brydges remained general manager of the Grand Trunk until 1874. He then became one of the commissioners of the Intercolonial Railway, and still later a land commissioner for the Hudson's Bay Company. He died in Winnipeg on February 16, 1889. There is no record that his career was damaged by the events of June 29, 1864.

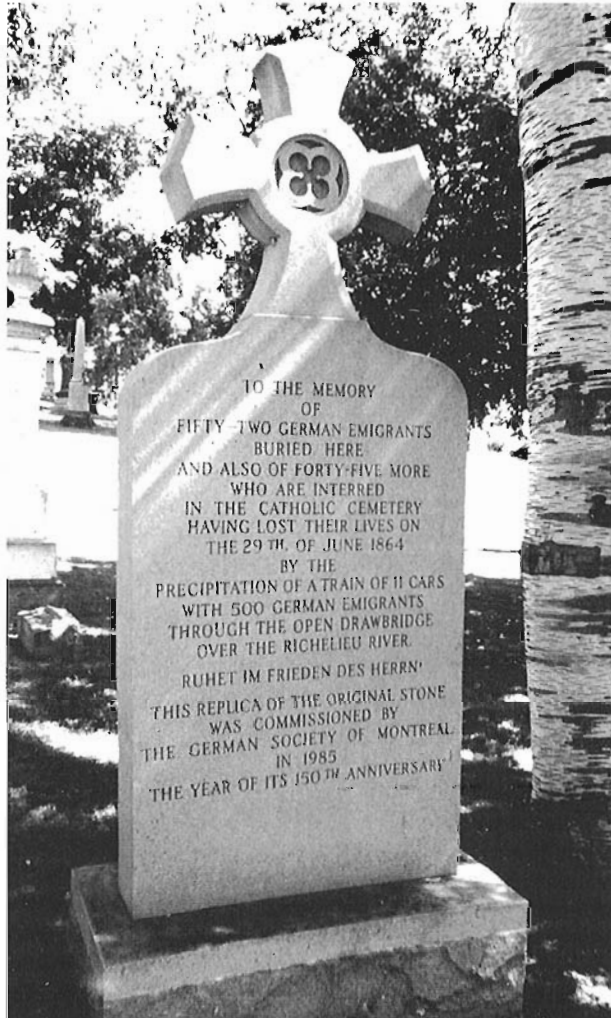
The story of the Beloeil Bridge Disaster was remembered for many years. Certainly the survivors would have vivid memories as long as they lived, and undoubtedly passed on their recollections to their children and grandchildren. As railway historian Omer Lavallée aptly put it "Around many a Canadian fireside, for countless years afterward, survivors of the luckless immigrant train would recall in harrowing detail the pathetic tragedy and human suffering which make up the

story of one of Canada's most spectacular railway accidents - and certainly its worst - the Beloeil Bridge Disaster".

As the years and decades passed, however, the story became more and more forgotten, and even entered the realm of folklore. Finally there was no one left who remembered it first hand. Unlike some disasters which are still clearly recalled, this one did not involve a famous first-class train, nor were there any well-known personalities aboard. Most histories of the period, even railway histories, do not mention it, and, to the best of our knowledge, no one ever wrote a song about it.

Undoubtedly there are many people living in Canada and the United States whose ancestors came to America on board the *Neckar*, and who survived the wreck at Beloeil. Some of these descendants may not even know of the ordeal their ancestors passed through, but others no doubt do, and among these people the story will likely always be kept alive.

Today at Beloeil there is a much newer and larger bridge, but on the same site as the old swing bridge. There is no monument or historical plaque to mark the spot, and the story is known mostly by only a few railway historians. All the Montreal - Quebec City passenger trains go that way, as does the "Ocean" and the "Chaleur". Anyone who knows the story must feel some emotion as he passes, safely and quickly, by that fatal spot. Although other accidents to ships and aircraft have had many more fatalities, never again has a Canadian train wreck claimed as many lives as at Beloeil. One cannot help but think of all those who perished there early in the morning of June 29 1864 - one hundred and thirty five years ago.



The end of the line for so many dreams. The German Society of Montreal arranged for the burial of the victims according to their religion. 52 were interred in Mount Royal (Protestant) Cemetery, and 45 in Cote des Neiges (Catholic). The sandstone monument erected in Mount Royal in 1864 stood for 121 years, but became very badly deteriorated. In 1985 the German Society replaced it with a beautiful replica of pink granite. The photo above, taken in 1999, shows the replica. Photo by Fred Angus

END NOTES

1. *Montreal Witness*, 30 July 1864
2. *Ibid.*
3. *The Gazette* (Montreal), 9 July 1864 citing testimony of C.J. Brydges before the Coroner's Jury, 7 July 1864
4. *Ibid.*, Testimony of Henry Bailey before the Coroner's Jury, 7 July 1864
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Montreal Witness*, 30 July 1864, citing letter from "several of the oldest and most experienced conductors whose names we are given."
7. *The Gazette*, 6 July 1864 citing testimony of Thomas King before the Coroner's Jury, 5 July 1864. Locomotive 168 was a Canadian-built engine made by Dan C. Gunn's Hamilton Locomotive Works of Hamilton, Canada West in April, 1857.
8. *Montreal Witness*, 27 July 1864, "The Burnie Habeas Corpus," citing sworn deposition made by William Burnie before

RETURN of the Accidents and Casualties which h pliance with the provisions of the "Accidents on

Date.	Time of Day or Night.	No. and description of train.	Name of Conductor.	Na Engl
1864 June 29..	1.30a.m	Emigrant special.	F. Sinn.....	W. Birni

Sworn to by THOMAS WILLIAM WOOD, Secretary of the Grand Trunk Ra
at Montreal, this 24th November, A.D. 1864.

(Signed,)

F. DOUC

APPENDIX

On this and the following six pages are some articles and documents pertaining to the disaster. The newspaper accounts are from the *Montreal Witness*, a paper that is not as frequently consulted these days, but whose coverage was as good as the larger dailys, or better. Of special note is the complete transcription of Burnie's testimony in the article entitled "The Burnie Habeas Corpus". Yet more significant is the scathing denunciation of the Grand Trunk managers in the "Presentment of the Grand Jury", at which time (October, 1864) "no bill" was found against William Burnie and he was set free. Despite this, the Grand Trunk decided to use the result of the original inquest when it made its official half-yearly summary-of-accidents report to the government on November 24, 1864. That report, which puts all the blame on Burnie, is printed above. Note that it contains several errors, besides the obvious (and intentional) one of assigning the blame to the wrong person. Immigrant is spelled "emigrant", conductor T. Finn is spelled "P. Sinn" and "S. Pinn", Burnie is spelled "Birnie", and the number of passengers killed is shown as 88 instead of 97.

All these extracts are in facsimile, slightly enlarged for clarity, but otherwise exactly as they appeared in 1864.

Judge Alywin seeking release from prison on bail to await his trial. Petition refused by Judge Alywin.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *The Gazette*, 11 July 1864 citing testimony of Wilhelm Kehler before the Coroner's Jury

11. *Ibid.*, 9 July 1864 citing testimony of Henry Bailey before the Coroner's Jury, 7 July 1864

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Montreal Witness*, 8 October 1864 citing presentment of the Grand Jury bringing in "no bill" against William Burnie, who was freed from prison, 5 October 1864.

14. *Ibid.*, 27 July 1864 citing Burnie's sworn deposition before Judge Alywin

15. *The Gazette*, 11 July 1864 citing testimony of Wilhelm Kehler before the Coroner's Jury

16. *The Witness*, 27 July 1864 citing Burnie's sworn testimony before Judge Alywin

17. *Ibid.*

re occurred on the Grand TRUNK RAILWAY, during the half-year ending 30th June, 1864.—Made in compliance with the "Railways Act," 20 Victoria, Chapter 12th, Section 14.

No. of man.	No. of Engine.	Place of Accident.	Name or descript'n of person injured or killed.	Whether passenger, employé or other	Nature of Acci- dent to person.	Damage done to Property.	Cause of Accident.	Coroner's verdict.
	168	Belœil Bridge...	Pinn, S..... Flynn, W..... Many others more or less injured.	conductor..... fireman and eighty- eight emig- rants.....	killed.....	Eng. & cars damaged...	Driver disregarding signals and special rule in regard to Belœil bridge.....	} Special verdict.

way Company of Canada, before me (Signed) T. W. WOOD,
Secretary of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada.
T, J. P. Certified, J. G. VANSITTART,
Secretary, Railway Board.

MONTREAL WEDNESDAY, JULY 27, 1864.

THE BURNIE HABEAS CORPUS.

A brief notice of the application made by Mr. Devlin before the Hon. Mr. Justice Aylwin appeared in these columns previous. Subjoined will be found the deposition of William Burnie the engine driver together with other portions of the proceedings before Judge Aylwin. Mr Devlin on making application submitted a copy of the commitment of the coroner together with the following deposition of Burnie sworn to by him before Judge Aylwin.

BURNIE'S STORY.

My name is William Burnie, I was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1838 and accompanied my mother to Canada, when I was about eight years of age, since which time I have resided in Richmond. In November 1856 I entered the employment of the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada, as cleaner of engines, and in this capacity I continued to act for a period of two years or thereabout; after which I was appointed night watchman, a duty which I performed, as nearly as I can remember, three years and a half; at the expiration of which time I was appointed fireman upon a Pilot Engine, and was almost exclusively engaged in this latter capacity up to the eighteenth day of June last, assisting the trains between Acton and Durham stations upon the Richmond Road. During that time I was paid the wages of a second-class fireman. Upon the 18th of June last I was for the first time placed in charge of a Pilot Engine, which was employed in assisting train from Richmond to Durham.

On or about the 25th of June last, I was notified by Thomas King, Locomotive foreman, at Richmond, that I would be required to run a

special train, loaded with immigrants, the arrival of which was immediately expected from Quebec; and that I should take charge of the said charge at Richmond and then run it to Montreal. I thereupon protested against doing so, as I did not know the road, and was answered by King that he could not help it, as he had no other one to send. In the meantime, Engine No. 145, of which W. Miller was driver, arrived from Sherbrooke, and I was relieved from taking charge of the train in question, Miller having been substituted for me. Afterwards, and on the 28th day of said month of June, I was again notified by King that an Emigrant train would arrive on the evening of that day at Richmond and that I must run it from there to Montreal, taking with me for this purpose the Pilot Engine. Finding that I must either go as directed, or lose my situation, I did not offer any further remonstrance; but told the said King, upon receiving his orders, that the pistons of the said Pilot Engine should be examined before leaving as they were in bad order. King told me to put the engine on the pit and get her examined. Therefore I proceeded to the workshop at Richmond for this purpose, but found that all the hands engaged there had left, as I understood, for the purpose of seeing a circus performance which was then going on at Richmond, and in consequence, the examination of the pistons did not take place. About half-past nine o'clock in the evening, the emigrant train arrived. Thomas King was not then present, he having as I understood, previously gone to the evening performance of the circus. In accordance with orders, I left with the said train, and with the pilot engine. The train consisted of eleven or twelve cars, exclusive of the tender

and engine. I had with me, belonging to the Company, one conductor, one boy, who had been a fireman of seven or eight days' experience, but who in reality was a cleaner taken from the shop at Richmond, to act as fireman for this occasion and who had never been over the road before as fireman, and one brakeman.

When I reach Acton, the brakeman Giroux came on the engine to show me the way, and several times when I was between St Hyacinthe and St. Hilaire, I was obliged to ask him where we were. At St. Hilaire we took in wood and water, and after a few minutes started. Before doing so, the conductor came on board the engine, and sent Giroux the brakeman to trim the tail lamp, suspended from the end of the rear car, saying that he would remain with me to show me the way, and give me such directions as I needed. I think it was about twenty minutes past one o'clock a m., when we left St. Hilaire and just as we were getting on the bridge over the Richelieu River at Belœil, I looked along the train to see how it was coming round the curve, which is met with immediately before reaching the bridge. In an instant after this, I saw the danger signal which appeared to me to be on that side of the bridge opposite to me. I whistled at once, without a moment's delay for the brakes to be put on. I used every effort in my power to reverse the engine and to stop the train, and did in fact reverse the engine, but unfortunately without succeeding in stopping the train. When I whistled for the brakes to be put on, I have no doubt that if they had been applied without delay, the accident which took place would not have occurred. The only brakes which could have been used for the purpose were attached to the rear car, and were within the reach of Giroux the brakeman only, who did not apply them as by me called for. The brake on the tender of the engine was broken and entirely useless. I had therefore no assistance rendered me for the stoppage of the said train. The moment, however, that the conductor saw the danger signal, he, without saying a word, jumped from the engine to the tender, and thence to the top of the first car with a view of getting to the brakes by running over the top of the cars, but he did not succeed, and, therefore, as I have already stated, no brakes were applied as they should have been. I, however, stuck to my engine and went down with her when she fell from the bridge into the Richelieu River owing to the Swing bridge being open. I struck the bottom of the River and was severely hurt in the side, in the leg, and out on the head. How I escaped or was rescued I know not; but I solemnly swear that I was on the engine to the last moment, and did not jump off nor at-

tempt to jump off. When I found myself on the Belœil side of the bridge my clothes were saturated with water; I was bleeding profusely, and afterwards had my wound dressed by a doctor and obtained a change of clothing.

Of the existence of the Draw bridge I was utterly ignorant, and supposed that if I succeeded in stopping the train before passing the danger signal, that all would be right. The place of danger was however between me and the signal, a fact of which I was also entirely ignorant.

To the best of my recollection I went over the road once before the accident in question, as fireman, and in summer. For the safety of the train there should at least have been two brakemen. There was but one. There should also have been a bell rope used, but there was none on this train. There should have been on the tender a good brake; that which was there was not good, on the contrary, it was utterly useless. The engine was also out of repair. The flanges on the trail wheel were worn to a sharp point which made her more unmanageable and dangerous. It was more difficult to stop her than other engines, for the reason that the steam blew through her, and did not produce the same effect that it would otherwise would; or, in other words, by the blowing of the steam through her the power to check her speed was greatly diminished. This defect was to the bad condition of her pistons. I also swear that I did not know of any rule requiring me to stop at the bridge, and that I never received a Rule Book from the Company or from any of its officers. The night I left with the train I borrowed a time table from the night watchman, William Aimes, at Richmond. Whilst I bitterly deplore the sad loss of life, that had occurred, I state positively that I exercised all the skill and knowledge which I possessed in the management of my engine, and that with the means at my disposal, I used every effort in my power to stop the train from the very moment I observed the danger signal. And I further state that the night I left Richmond with the said train, there were two engine drivers, Martin Wakefield, and William Haggart, either of whom could have been sent in my place. They have been engine drivers for several years, whilst I had not more than eleven days experience in that capacity, previous to the melancholy accident in question.

Mr. Devlin begged to present on behalf of William Burney now a prisoner confined in the common gaol under the warrant of the Coroner, a petition for a writ of *habeas corpus* with the object of obtaining his release upon bail to await his trial. The application he firmly believed was

fully warranted by the circumstances under which it was made as in his Mr. Devlin's opinion the evidence adduced before the coroner and which, after all could only be regarded as an ex parte account of the sad and melancholy loss of life which occurred disclosed the fact that Burnie was guiltless of the crime imparted to him. Mr. Devlin, carefully examined the testimony upon which it was sought to hold his client liable and he had no hesitation in expressing it as his opinion that the finding of the coroner's jury such as it was did not meet the exigencies of the case and utterly fails to throw the responsibility of the act upon the shoulders of those who should be made to bear the burden. The fact was it could scarcely be regarded as a Verdict and seemed more like an excuse for the exculpation of guilt than the result of a searching enquiry into the acts of wrong doers, Mr Devlin then proceeded to discuss the evidence and argued that his client did everything in his power to avert the catastrophe that had occurred, and would have succeeded had a sufficient number of Brakesmen been at their posts as they ought to have been to obey his orders. He also dwelt strongly upon the fact that the Engine was out of order and could not be managed with the required facility. Burnie he said clung to his Engine to the last moment and went down with her, thus showing that notwithstanding the imminence of the danger he never for an instant deserted his post. It was true he was saved but equally certain was it that it was by no effort of his that his safety was brought about. Under all the circumstances with which his Honor was now familiar he Mr Devlin hoped that the prayer of the Petition would be granted and that Burnie would be admitted to bail; and he had no hesitation in saying that when the day of trial came he would establish the allegations contained in his client's affidavit and prove to the satisfaction of Judge and Jury that William Burnie was the victim and not the criminal.

Mr. Johnson, Q. O., in resisting the application said every one must of course feel deeply distressed at the painful situation in which the prisoner stood; but this consideration must not deter them from addressing themselves in a direct manner to the actual and legal position he occupied. That position was one of a man under accusation by inquisition of a coroner, of voluntary homicide whether effected by an act of commission or omission mattered not. In dealing with the question of bail, the practice he said was different in cases of homicide from that in all other cases. Homicide was never bailed except it were in the power of the prisoner to make out a case of clear justification. His learned friend had alluded to the

criminal conduct of others as tending to shield the prisoner from the consequences of his own acts. His, Mr Johnson's duty was not to shield criminals; but to bring them to justice, and he should at the proper time be prepared to deal with all such to the best of his judgment; but at present they had merely to consider the case of Burnie himself, and he could not perceive that by undertaking a duty which he said himself he was unfit he exempted himself from the direct responsibility of having voluntarily done an act resulting in homicide.

The proceedings having been postponed until the Coroner should file the Indenture of Inquisition, on Thursday morning at 11 o'clock the parties again appeared before Judge Aylwin when he gave the following

JUDGMENT.

Mr Justice Aylwin said.—After the most careful consideration bestowed upon all the facts connected with this application and the finding of the Coroner's Jury he felt it to be his duty to refuse the petition. The charge against the prisoner was a most serious one; a terrible loss of life had taken place almost at our very doors and however much the circumstances so minutely detailed in the prisoner's affidavit might affect his punishment in the event of his conviction, he could not now accept that explanation as a refutation of the crime of which he stood accused. He would however have his day when the fullest opportunity would be afforded to him to lay before a Jury of his country all the facts and circumstances which might operate in his favor. But until that day arrived, not now far distant, he must remain in confinement. Much had been said of his affidavit but the learned counsel who represents the prisoner knew well that it cannot be received as evidence in his favor. At the same time he (the Judge) could not help remarking that it was well to produce that affidavit. It contained a very clear and apparently candid history of the entire transaction and most certainly disclosed a most extraordinary state of things. Burnie by his own showing did not know the road he should therefore rather have forfeited his place than for the sake of keeping it undertake to do that which he knew himself incapable of doing. This however was not the proper time for discussing his liability or accountability as to the remarks made of the supposed criminality of other parties he the judge would see that at the proper time the law was enforced against every man who was within the jurisdiction of the court and who ought to be made to answer for his share in the destruction of so many valuable lives. Petition refused.

MONTREAL WITNESS, SATURDAY, JULY 30, 1864.

LETTER FROM AN OLD CONDUCTOR.

We have published in a former number a communication from an experienced conductor, who has not long since left the service of the Grand Trunk for another position. He showed very forcibly from the rules of the company and several precedents, that the conductor, and not the engine-driver, is the person chiefly responsible for the safety of a train; even to the seeing of signals of danger and the applying of the brakes, and he drew the safe conclusion that the jury by ignoring entirely this chief responsibility, and having not a word upon the action of the conductor at the time and place of the accident, had committed a serious mistake, and done grievous injustice to the engine-driver, who expiates now in jail the sins of others. We have a further communication from the same "Old Conductor," corroborating from various instances the statement on the Grand Trunk Railway, that the company in the matter of irregularity or accidents to trains, always holds the conductor responsible, letting the engine-driver alone, unless he has evidently broken some rule, or disobeyed a positive order of the conductor. Much however, of this communication contains matter which will surely come as evidence before the court when Burney is tried; and as it refers to the names of several individuals, can more appropriately be reserved for that occasion.

There is, however, one very important fact in the letter from the "Old Conductor" which had better be pointed out at once. He contradicts entirely the statement made before the

jury, that the late Finn was one of the best and most experienced conductors on the line. On the contrary, it was the opinion expressed by several of the oldest and most experienced conductors, whose names are given, that he was not competent,—and indeed the conviction had been expressed by these men that some serious accident would be some day the result of this and two other similar appointments; but that the Company was not likely, until a catastrophe occurred, to accept any light on the subject. This is a matter which we trust will be thoroughly investigated by the Court.

We believe that our correspondent was mistaken in supposing that all the rules and regulations of the Grand Trunk were not laid before the jury; but it is evident at least that they did not examine them with sufficient care, or else they would have attached some blame to the Conductor beyond that of an omission of duty when far away from the bridge in Richmond. There is, however, in the Time Table and Special Rules one article which again and again came before the jury, namely, the following:—

"All trains and single engines must come to a stop before crossing the Richelieu Bridge, and are not to proceed *without permission from the man in charge of the bridge.*"

That is to say that not only were the trains to stop, which they did not, but they were not authorized to cross without first communicating with the man in charge of the bridge, who should report everything safe. Such a rule insures perfect safety, if enforced, but it was systematically neglected.

MONTREAL, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1864.

PRESENTMENT OF THE GRAND JURY.

On Tuesday the Grand Jury brought in, "no bill" against Wm. Burney, the engine driver of the train that met with the catastrophe at Belœil Station who was indicted for manslaughter. They also made the following important presentment.

The Grand Jury in submitting the following presentment, would express their great obligation to His Honor, Justice Drummond, for his very able address at the opening of the Session,

in which he so clearly explained to them the nature of their duties and obligations, which they have strictly kept in view, and have endeavored to realize and fulfil to the best of their ability. They have given the several matters submitted to them their careful consideration, and while they would congratulate the district on the comparatively small number of very serious crimes, still they have found on the calendar charges of great magnitude, in the embezzlement case of Mackenzie, and the record of the deplorable

rable event of the 29th June last, on the Grand Trunk Railway, when a train was precipitated into the Richelieu River at Belœil, through the opened draw-bridge, carrying a human freight of four hundred and sixty-seven souls. The facts of the former will appear in due course, during the sessions of the Court, but because of No Bill of Indictment being found against William Burnie, the driver of the train, accused of manslaughter, it remains for the Grand Jury, in pursuance of the instructions of the Court, to present before it and the country, so far as they have been able to ascertain the facts of this sad occurrence, which they regret to say, is mainly due to circumstances within the control of the Grand Trunk Company, and which the Grand Jury trusts the Court and Attorney General will find means to make them answer for in the past, and make them guard against a recurrence of in the future. The laws of the country have been deliberately and habitually broken and infringed and a numerous and welcome band of immigrants which our Legislature has been endeavoring to attract to our shores, has been shamefully and disgracefully used on their arrival and progress through our country; while a large portion of them have been consigned to an early grave, and upon the remainder has been entailed an amount of injury and suffering hitherto unparalleled in the history of the Province.

The difference between individuals and corporations in the eyes of the criminal law has necessitated our stepping aside from the usual course, and in this manner presenting the charges which by evidence submitted to us, we deem it our duty to do against the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada, who have in this melancholy instance not only themselves entirely to blame for the occurrence, but also been utterly and shamefully wanting in what was due to the 467 passengers they carried, who with their lives were entrusted to their care. These charges resolve themselves as follows, to wit: That the Grand Trunk Corporation, on the 28th day of June last past, did assume to carry and convey, that is to say, the number of four hundred and sixty-seven passengers in one train, from Point Levi to Montreal, and to a greater distance, without having suitable and proper cars for their conveyance, and that they did so set out with such passengers towards said destination. That the said Company employed six freight cars for the conveyance of over three hundred and sixty of said passengers, buddling together in each of these cars an average of fully sixty persons, equal to about fifty adults, said cars being only about half the size of second-class cars, which are considered full with fifty or sixty passengers; in other

words with only half the space which said passengers were entitled to, although they had paid the full and usual fare for the journey on which they were bound; and that they (the Company) did also cram the passage of a second-class car with standing passengers, (on a journey of 150 miles) after having filled all the seats therein. That the Grand Trunk Railway Company stowed away this mass of human beings promiscuously, and without regard to sex or age, in these close box freight cars, affording them no light in the day-time, nor any air beyond what was admitted through the imperfectly filled doors, and, after night set in, refusing to give them any lamps or light whatsoever. That said Grand Trunk Railway Company failed to afford to said passengers, at intervals along a journey of nine or ten hours, permission to leave said cars to answer the calls of nature, more particularly the women and children who could not possibly force their way out of the cars (as did some of the men when the doors were open to admit a pail of water) nor descend therefrom without a ladder, which was not provided, but were compelled to procure relief as best they might in the sitting or standing positions which they occupied in these over-filled cars, to the setting aside of common decency, and to the disgust of themselves and their fellow passengers. That said Grand Trunk Railway Company did in continuance of said journey to Montreal, start after nightfall from Richmond with only one brakeman to control the train instead of at least 2, as is customary on such a train of cars when used for freight as there should have been on such a train as this seeing that the cars were much less convenient of access than ordinary passenger cars, and that the company had in charge over a large number of passengers who were entitled to some attention at stations, and also because of the absence of a baggage man who, on a passenger train, is available as a brakeman, and otherwise when the train is in motion. And this, notwithstanding the remonstrance of the only brakeman on the train, who at first refused to start without assistance from Richmond, and who only proceeded under promise that a second brakeman should be provided at the first station; and so on from station to station, until the train was engulfed in the river at Belœil. That said Grand Trunk Company did entrust the care of so valuable a freight of human life to an engine driver who had never before, as such, been over the road from Richmond to Montreal, and who had only been promoted to drive an engine ten days previously, and that only a pilot engine, and that they did send with him a fireman who, in that capacity,

had never been over that part of the road at all, and knew nothing whatever of it. And that they permitted the train to continue its journey, after the ignorance of the driver and fireman had been made known to the conductor and brakeman. And that they did permit the only brakeman on the train to ride on the engine, and to act as pilot to the driver from Acton to St. Hilaire, passing several stations, among them the principal station of St. Hyacinthe, thereby leaving the train with its so valuable freight during this part of the journey without any brakemen whatever to stop the train in case of emergency or accident, or for the usual and necessary purpose of checking the speed in down grades, and for the other duties for which brakemen are usually employed; and that they did permit said train to start from Richmond and to continue its journey until it went through the drawbridge on the Richelieu river, without being furnished with the usual bell-rope or other means of communication between the two ends of the train.

That the said Grand Trunk Company permitted said train to proceed on to the drawbridge at Belœil station without first coming to a stop, as required by the statute law of the country, which even requires that the stop shall be absolute, and for the full period of three minutes. And that they habitually did permit this practice of crossing on the bridge without stopping to obtain leave, notwithstanding the law of the country, and the frequent reports of the bridge-keeper as to its infraction; he having testified before the Grand Jury that he reported this on four different occasions without any notice whatever being taken of his report; his assistant also testifying that during six years of his attendance at the bridge, on no occasion did trains ever come to a stand on the south side of the bridge, unless they had business at Belœil Station.

That since the statute law of the country required a stop of at least three full minutes to be made before coming on to a drawbridge, the Grand Trunk Company should have rule 24 in their special rules with reference to said law, and not as it is at present framed merely requiring them to stop, thereby misleading their employees, instead of instructing them in the proper performance of their duty in conformity with the law which bears thereon. And that they failed to communicate to their employees, that the law required a full stop of three minutes before taking the bridge, and that there was a penalty of four hundred dollars for each time of failing so to do, as amply testified to by many of their employees, who declared they did not know of any such law.

That the said Grand Trunk Company in their time tables have fixed the period of departure of the passenger trains from Belœil *five minutes only* after the time of departure from St. Hilaire, notwithstanding the distance to be traversed, the caution required in the down grade before reaching the curve, the curve itself, the law requiring them to stop a full period of three minutes before taking the bridge, besides the crossing the bridge and coming to the station, necessitating a consumption of at least ten minutes to accomplish a mile; and thereby obliging engine drivers if they would keep the time in Time Table to drive over this most dangerous part of the road at the rate of twelve miles an hour, and not stop at all before going on to the bridge.

That the Grand Trunk Company should have caused to be placed on the south side of the bridge at Belœil, at all times, day and night, a red or danger signal, as is customary on all railways, to indicate that trains and engines must stop before going on to said bridge.

And for the above mentioned and other very grave and serious acts of omission and commission, the Grand Jury consider it their duty to reiterate their solemn conviction that the Grand Trunk Company of Canada are mainly responsible and to blame for the melancholy catastrophe of the 29th of June last, and the great destruction of life caused thereat, and that they said Company will be found amenable to tribunal for their shameful treatment of their numerous passengers on that occasion.

The Grand Jury cannot close this subject without reminding the numerous employes on the Grand Trunk Railway, and all other such works, that no man can be justified who assumes to perform any duty for which he does not possess the requisite knowledge and qualification, and without bringing to the attention of officials and superintendents, that they should in all their appointments exercise the greatest care possible that such should be; and that it is not only their province to make and frame the best rules in their power for the governance of the employes under them, but that it is also their bounden duty to watch closely that these rules are carried out.

All which is respectfully submitted.

(Signed.)

JOHN O. BROWN,
Foreman.

GRAND JURY ROOM at Montreal, }
5th October, 1864. }

His Honor having thanked the Grand Jury for the diligence they had displayed, discharged them.

The Downtown Vancouver Historic Railway

By Peter Murphy

Canada's newest electric railway just got bigger! July 15, 1999 marked the official opening of another 1/2 mile extension to the "Downtown Vancouver Historic Railway". The trolley line is pushing east along the south side of False Creek; the ultimate destination is Stanley Park. Further extensions are expected in the near future towards this goal.

Newly restored B.C. Electric car 1231 was placed on the line on Wednesday, July 14, 1999 and ran for the first time in limited test operation the day of the official opening. Brake problems prevented it from being put into regular service but repairs are expected to be completed shortly.

Car 1231 joins car 1207 which has been in service for over a year; the car barn, which is located at Leg in Boot station, is now in the middle of the line. It will be moved and expanded to a new location so both cars can be housed.

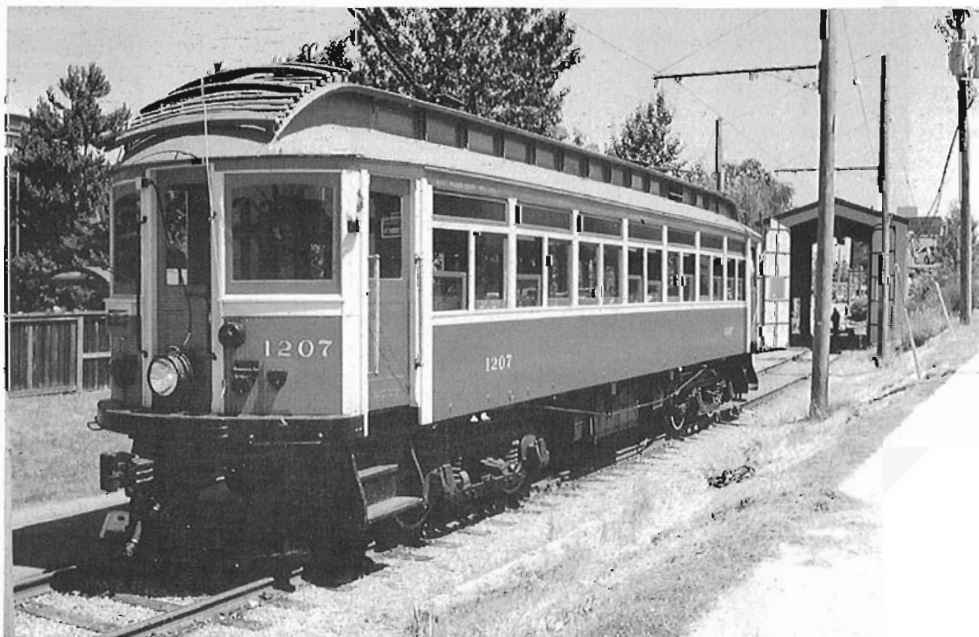


Cars 1207 and 1231 at Main Street station, the temporary eastern end of the newly expanded line.

Photo by Bill Bailey

Come on Board!
RIDE THE D.H.R.

City of Vancouver



Car 1207 poses outside the car barn. This car was built in 1905 in the B.C. Electric's own shops. It is 50 feet long and weighs 71,500 lbs. It has rattan seats in the parlour and wood seats in the smoking section. It operated on Vancouver's interurban line, and it cost 85 cents to ride from Vancouver to Steveston, or five cents between any two adjoining stations. On February 28, 1958 it made the ceremonial last run of B.C. Electric's interurban service.

Photo by Peter Murphy



Mayor Owen of Vancouver is flanked by Bill and Shirley Bailey, who were instrumental in the restoration of 1231, as they cut yet another ceremonial cake. Photo courtesy of Bill Bailey



Line shot showing the quality of rail and overhead construction. Photo by Peter Murphy

DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER HISTORIC RAILWAY

TICKET NO. **6824**

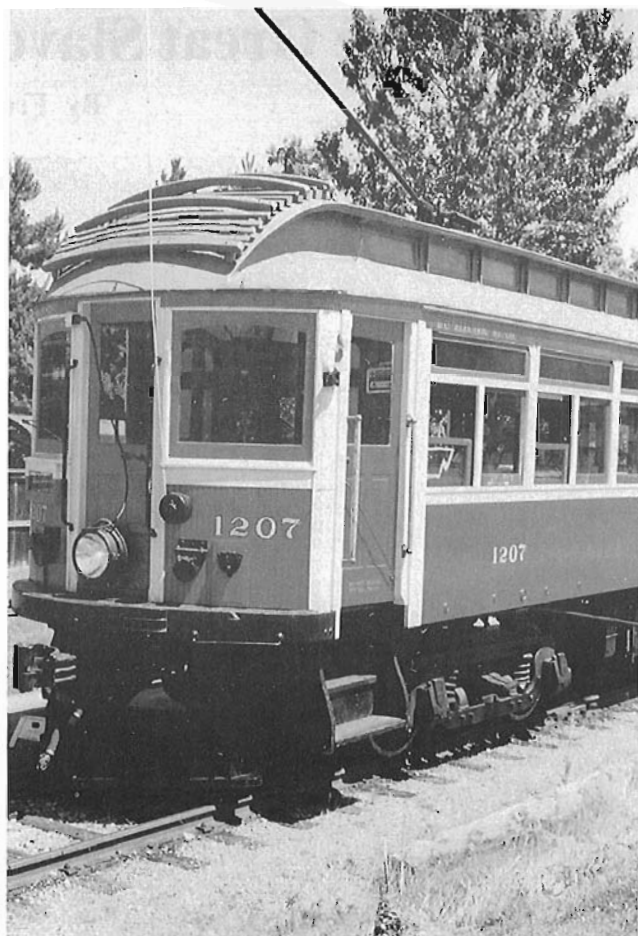
MAY	OPERATING SCHEDULE	01	11	21
		02	12	22
JUNE	BETWEEN LEG-IN-BOOT & GRANVILLE ISLAND STATIONS	03	13	23
JULY	13:00 - 17:00	04	14	24
AUGUST	SAT. SUN, HOLIDAYS	05	15	25
SEPTEMBER	JUNE TO SEPTEMBER (MAY & OCTOBER)	06	16	26
OCTOBER	WEATHER PERMITTING)	07	17	27
		08	18	28
		09	19	29
		10	20	30
				31

SEE TIMES LISTED AT STATION

GOOD FOR RETURN TRIP ONLY ON DATE SHOWN ABOVE

ADULT \$2.00 / UNDER 13 & OVER 65 \$1.00

RETURN
VOID



Two views of 1207 on the Downtown Vancouver Historic Railway. Photos by Peter Murphy

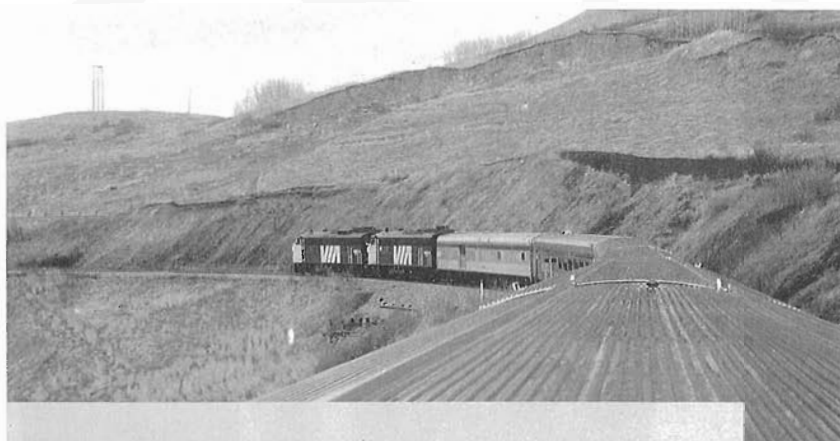


Along the line facing east from Leg in Boot station. Photo by Bill Bailey

The Great Slave Lake Excursion

By Fred Angus

The first passenger train to Hay River, North West Territories for many years, and possibly only the second ever, was operated, early in April 1999, by the Pacific Coast Chapter of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society of California. This is the furthest north one can travel by rail and still be connected to the rest of North America. The line was recently sold by CN and is now operated by Rail Link. The special train, consisting of VIA cars 8605, Alexandra, Franklin Manor, Mackenzie Manor, Christie Manor, Kootenay Park, were attached to the "Canadian" from Vancouver to Edmonton, and then ran as a special behind engines 6302 and 6304. The excursion was a great success, and it is hoped that others of similar type will be offered in the future.



ABOVE: The northbound train coming down into the valley of the Peace River; April 4, 1999.

LEFT: The first VIA crew to work in the North West Territories pose at the border, going north, April 5, 1999.

BELOW: The special train at Hay River backing to the wye (at the former line to Pine Point) on April 5, 1999.

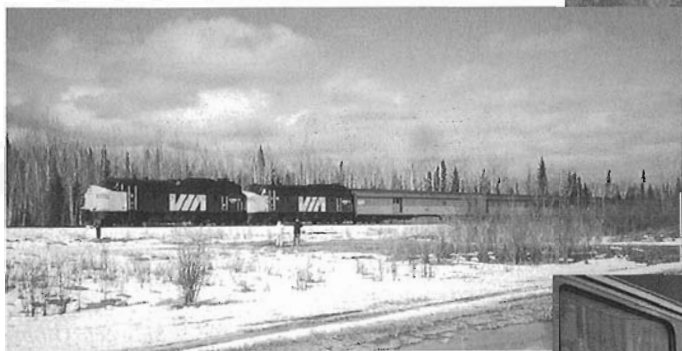
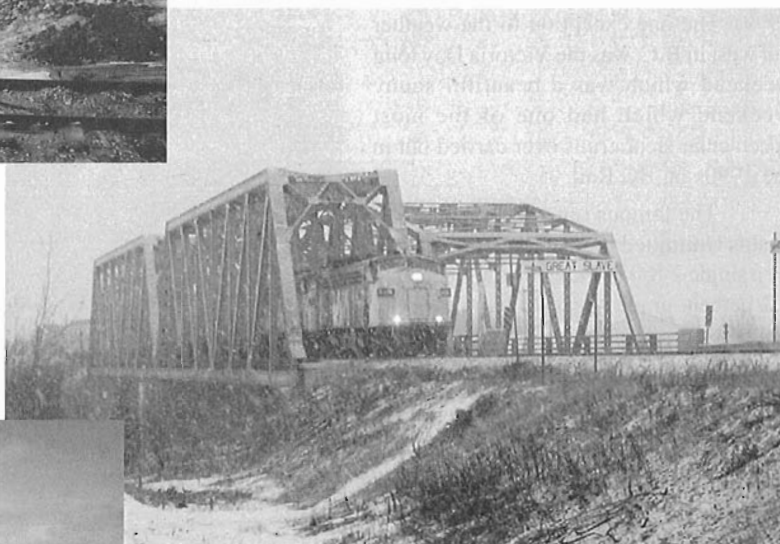
BOTTOM: Parked at Hay River on April 6, 1999. The train remained here for the duration of the visit.





LEFT: The transfer table of the marine railway at Hay River as seen on April 6, 1999. Each "track" consists of three parallel standard gauge tracks which carry trucks on which rest the boats. To go from one of these "tracks" to another, the boats go on this huge transfer table which itself runs on a number of parallel tracks. Is this the widest gauge railway operation in Canada?

RIGHT: On April 7, 1999, on the return trip, a runpast was held in a snowstorm at the bridge leaving Hay River. Note the sign reading "Great Slave" with the CN symbol replaced by the Rail Link insignia.



LEFT: Another runpast was held on April 7 at the border between the Northwest Territories and Alberta. By now the snow had stopped and the sun had come out.

RIGHT: Arrival at Peace River, Alberta was at 5:35 A.M. on April 8, 1999, several hours ahead of the originally scheduled time. This allowed plenty of time to look around, as well as for a visit from the mayor and other officials. Here we see one of the passenger cars being watered in preparation for the trip south.



LEFT: On leaving Peace River (9:30 A.M. on April 8, 1999) those who wanted to could take a bus which went to scenic spots to photograph the train. At the last such stop they then boarded the train for the trip south to Edmonton. The "runpast" shown here occurred on a spectacular wooden trestle. The arrival back at Edmonton was at 30 minutes after midnight on April 9, which was 6 1/2 hours early. All photos by Fred Angus

A 2-8-0 Working Up the Grade in May 1999

By David J Meridew

May was mostly a cool cloudy month in British Columbia in 1999 (while the exact opposite I hear, was a heat spell reported back East in the late spring of 1999). The one exception to the weather out west in B.C. was the Victoria Day long weekend which was a beautiful sunny weekend which had one of the most spectacular steam runs ever carried out in the 1990s on BC Rail.

The famous run was pulled off by Trains Unlimited tours with a train hauled by a single 2-8-0 working up the steep long 2.2 percent grade out of Lillooet to Kelly Lake.

It all began at North Vancouver on Saturday morning May 22, 1999. BC Rail's ex CPR 3716 departed with one



ABOVE: 3716 at Lillooet, B.C. just before departing on its trip to Kelly Lake.

LEFT: Leaving Lillooet, northbound towards the bridge over the Fraser River.

BELOW: 3716 exiting Gibbs tunnel at mile 168.4, upgrade from Lillooet.

OPPOSITE TOP: At mile 168.9 between Gibbs tunnel and the highway overpass.

OPPOSITE MIDDLE: The train at mile 170 between Gibbs and Glen Fraser.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: 3716 arriving upgrade at Pavilion.

All photos by the author on May 23, 1999.

baggage car and three coaches. and after a few run-bys along the way it sneaked its passengers in to Lillooet about 19:00.

The next morning May 23rd was the big day! Bright and clear and warm, railfans lay in ambush with their lens caps off. 3716 was not going to be rushed, the 9:00 departure was cancelled to allow a BC Rail freight to come down grade to Lillooet. Once the north switch was cleared the 2-8-0 blasted off at 9:50. A mile later it stopped across the Fraser river bridge - it seems some passengers wanted to get off.

They climbed the hill, but the steam engine did not. It sneaked back across the bridge towards Lillooet again. Now with every one of those adventurous passengers up the hill,

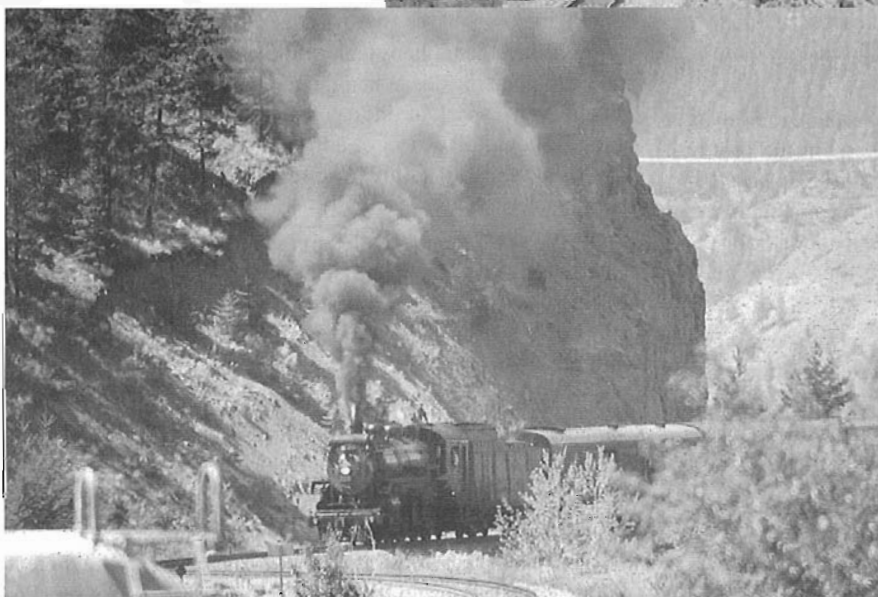




wheezing, gasping for air and can't hold their cameras still, 3716 blasted across the bridge straight at them in a fury of smoke and flame - while across the valley far away on a road, big teles were image taking.

The 2-8-0 simmered down, backed up to pick up the customers, while the big teles jumped on their wheels and headed up grade for the next ambush. 3716 did not disappoint, at Fountain, Gibbs, Glenfraser and Pavilion the 2-8-0 showed what its was built to do on a steep mountain grade.

The 2.2 percent grade continues all the way (after crossing



the Fraser river bridge) to Kelly Lake but the road and rail splits at Pavilion leaving the long teles single, lonely and deprived of hot steam (only their cars now have that)..They the image takers, they can't afford wings! are stranded at Pavilion their lens caps go back on.

3716 image taking is now solely the responsibility of the onboard passengers.

Still a few desperate long teles jump into their hot cars and take a detour to Clinton and then south to Kelly Lake for one more chance at an ambush of 3716.

Meanwhile less insane long teles lie in wait back at Pavilion for the return of the 2-8-0. They snooze under the shade of a Pavilion tree, while the woodticks crawl into their hair.

Then the chase begins again at Pavilion, down grade with a single run-by at Glenfraser. 3716 is weaker now, its power strokes muted to prevent a runaway. If they are not careful they won't be able to stop where they arrive at Lillooet. Some of the long teles arrive too, dusty, sunburnt and even some with woodticks in their hair!

Sunday May 23, 1999 was the greatest day in the history of BC Rail's ownership of 3716 for displaying, out in the open, to general public, what a 2-8-0 can really do on continuous steep grade.

The next day Monday May 24, 1999, 3716 departed Lillooet at 7:55 a.m. southbound for North Vancouver and home.

Sperry Testing Track in Sweden and Norway

Editor's note: The following article appeared in the May 1 1999 issue of the *News-Times* of Danbury Connecticut, the city in which is the headquarters of Sperry Rail Service. The article is reprinted here as it represents the extension of operations of a company which has tested track in Canada for almost 70 years. Although conditions in Canada are very much the same as in the United States, those in Europe are not. Hence the new car, SRS 200, has quite a different appearance from the Sperry cars we are accustomed to seeing on so many of North America's railways. Most notable from a quick glance are the buffers and the new streamlined shape, but there are many other differences as we read from the article below.

Sperry enters high-tech arena to test Scandinavian railroads

John Pirro, News-Times



Sperry Rail President Tom DeJoseph, left, talks with workers who are doing the final tests on a high-tech car the company designed and built.

Danbury - Sometime next week, a self-propelled rail car will roll out of the Sperry Rail Services shop on a trip that will take it across the Atlantic Ocean and into the Arctic Circle. "We hope it never comes back" said Sperry President Tom DeJoseph.

An odd wish, perhaps, for the \$1 million-plus, one-of-a-kind vehicle that the company designed and spent the past four months building. But should the wish come true, it would represent an almost incalculable payout on a gamble the Shelter Rock Road company took when it decided to expand its long-established, U.S. rail-testing operations into the European market.

The diesel-powered, yellow-and-black car, resembling at first glance an enormous bus, is loaded with computer and electronic equipment designed to detect the tiniest flaw in the twin steel rails on which it runs. Sperry conceived it in a successful attempt to win contracts to inspect the tracks used by the national railways in Sweden and Norway.

"We'd bid on another contract there several years ago, but we lost the bid, mainly because we didn't have a piece of equipment that could do what this one does" DeJoseph said.

Although Sperry, which has been in business for 71 years - the last 51 in Danbury - is the world's largest provider of rail flaw detection services, all of its equipment was geared for use on American railroads, where the predominant traffic is heavy, slow-moving freight trains. Consequently, most of its testing vehicles are designed to move at speeds of about 13 mph.

But in Europe, most trains carry passengers and run at speeds in excess of 100 miles per hour. As a result, the window of opportunity for track testing is smaller. "You have to be able to cover the track as quickly as possible" said Robin Clark, Sperry's director of engineering. The new rail tester can routinely operate at 50 kilometers per hour, about 35 mph.

But track speed isn't the only thing that has to run faster. Faster computers and electronics are necessary to assimilate the data being collected and display it in a manner that can be easily understood later.

As the car moves over the tracks, ultrasound equipment sends sound waves to the core of the steel rails, probing for defects that are invisible to the eye.

When the molten steel for the rails is poured, impurities can be trapped inside. When the rails are extruded to their full length, even a speck of dirt can develop into a crack or another defect. Should the wheel of a loaded, 150-ton freight car hit it just right, the rail could fracture, possibly resulting in a derailment.

Sperry's contract with the companies in the two countries call for the car and its three-man crew to conduct the inspections for three or four months a year over the next five years. The company hopes the down time can be used to develop contracts with other European railroads.

In addition to its crew, Sperry is sending a 10-member team, headed by director of special projects Alistair Veitch, to Sweden next month to make sure the project gets off on the right track. "This is the first time a U.S. company has been in Europe for this kind of work in a long time" Veitch said.

The test car will travel by rail to Newark, N.J. where it will be loaded on a ship for Sweden. It's due to arrive May 26.

The Business Car



MATTAWA-TEMISKAMING TIMBER TRAIN



The excursion train, inaugurated last year, running between Mattawa Ontario and Temiskaming Quebec, is running its 1999 season with "new" equipment. The above view shows it at Mattawa on July 31, 1999. Instead of borrowed Ontario Northland coaches, the train now runs with four former CPR 800 series commuter cars, built in 1953, from the Montreal Lakeshore service. Cars 815, 824, 828, 829 have become 7401 to 7404 respectively. The remaining 36 cars of the series are still in service in Montreal. Motive power is lettered Rail Link for the owners of the line. Although billed as one of the best new attractions in Ontario, almost all of the run is in Quebec! The trip is extremely scenic, and will be even more so with the fall colours. There is plenty of time at Temiskaming to explore the town and visit the museum.

OKANAGAN VALLEY WINE TRAIN



The Okanagan Valley Wine Train, mentioned in the March-April issue of Canadian Rail, finally began operation on July 2. The trips of July 2 and 3 were evening runs, the first daytime trip being on July 4. Your editor had the privilege of being on the first day trip, and took the above photo at Kewlona. The ride is very scenic, and the trip is recommended to anyone travelling in British Columbia.

NEW CANADIAN 25 CENT PIECE



As part of the commemoration of the upcoming new millennium, the Royal Canadian Mint is issuing a series of twenty-four 25 cent pieces, one each month for 1999 and 2000. The one for June, 1999 shows a CPR 4-4-0 locomotive of the 1880s. The coins are very attractive, and, unlike many commemoratives, are available at face value. If you can't get them from the bank, try the post office. They are meant for circulation, so one way of promoting interest in railways is to get them and spend them, so others will get interested too. They are also excellent keepsakes, so don't spend all of them.

NORTH TORONTO STATION TO BE RENOVATED



In 1916 the CPR built a beautiful station on Toronto's Yonge Street. This station was used for passengers for only 14 years, being closed in 1930. In 1939 it was reopened for only one day for the Royal Train. In recent years it has been a liquor store, but it still retains most of its decorations including the impressive clock tower. Recently it was announced that it will be renovated, but will not be a station for the foreseeable future.

MURAL MURAL ON THE WALL

The last two issues of Canadian Rail have not had any additions to our popular series of views of murals with railway subjects. We have lots of new photos of murals that we have not reported before, and we will continue the series soon.

APOLOGY FOR DELAY

This issue of Canadian Rail is very late due to several reasons. Your editor was away much of July, and then there was a problem with one of the drives of the computer. Then additional material arrived relating to the Beloeil Bridge Disaster, and it was decided to wait and include it. Hopefully our publication will soon be back on schedule.

BACK COVER: No, it's not the approach to Victoria Bridge in 1954, it's the Old Port of Montreal in July, 1999! The occasion was a display of equipment from the Canadian Railway Museum in connection with Canada Day celebrations. One of the stars of the show was former Montreal & Southern Counties car 611, built in 1917, which was restored for the occasion along with other pieces from the Museum's collection.

Photo by Peter Murphy

Canadian Rail

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